shadow star

影なる星

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

MOHIRO KITOH

shadow star

儀なる星珠たる子

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HOSHIMARU ...?

YOU *REALLY* REMEMBER HIS FACE?

BUT EVEN SO, WE'LL PROBABLY *NEVER* FIND HIM THIS WAY, SHIINA.

ALTHOUGH I THINK I'D... *PREFER* THAT...

OH... I'M SORRY!

I GUESS...

SHIINA CAN'T HEAR MY VOICE, CAN SHE?

HOSHIMARU, WHY AREN'T YOU AND SHIINA...

...COMPLETELY *CHANNELED?*

I WISH MY VOICE COULD REACH HER.

NO LUCK ON YOUR END, RIGHT?

AKIRA...?

AH... SHE'S TALKING TO ENSOF.

YES, I CAN SEE YOU... AND EVEN *FEEL* YOU.

IT FEELS SO GOOD, LIKE SHIINA'S HOLDING *ME.*

EVEN IF IT IS HOT TODAY.

I CAN ONLY SAY THIS BECAUSE I KNOW SHE CAN'T HEAR ME, BUT...

IT'S SORT OF LIKE... LIKE...

...BEING CRADLED BY A *MOTHER.*

IF IT'S "YES," RAISE *ONE* HAND, ENSOF.

TWO HANDS FOR "NO."

GEE, I WISH HE'D HURRY UP AND SHOW...

.....

VMP

YOU'RE SO *LUCKY*, AKIRA. YOU CAN SEE EVERYTHING AROUND *ME*... RIGHT?

THEWW

BUT MAYBE IT'S THE SAME FOR *BOTH* OF *US?*

AND WE'RE HUGGING EACH *OTHER...*

HUH ...?

HEY, AKIRA... ENSOF'S TURNED ALL RED, AND HIS EYES ARE SORTA WATERY.

ARE YOU GUYS OKAY ...?

HUH?

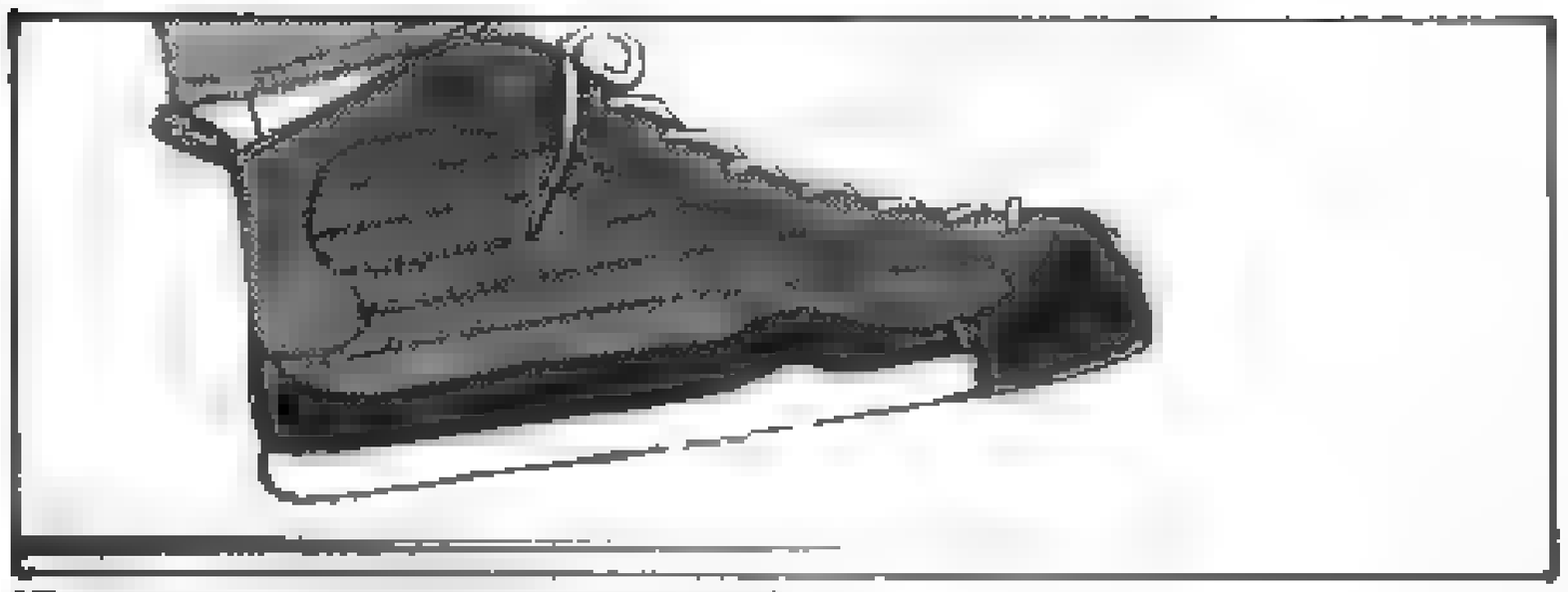
UM... ....

HEY... AKIRA?

WHY DID YOU CUT YOUR HAIR?

IT WAS SO BEAUTIFUL...

.... BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE SAID THAT.



SIGHH
IT'LL BE A MIRACLE IF WE FIND HIM THIS WAY.
LIKE...
....
LIKE DESTINY.

MY FORTUNE FOR TODAY SAYS I WON'T FIND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.

I DON'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT SHIINA, BUT--
FWT
HUH?

AAH!

Π... IT'S *HIM!*

NO WAY!

N NO WAY

ARE... ARE YOU SURE?!

:ULP:

SHIINA ...?

HEY, WAKE UP!

WAUGH!!

FAP

HUH? WHOA!

EEP! UH... DOC?

SORRY ABOUT THAT, BUT...

...WHY ARE YOU STANDING AROUND OUT *HERE?* AREN'T YOU GOING TO YOUR FATHER'S ROOM?

AH... UMM...

I'M HEADED THAT WAY, TOO. WHY DON'T YOU COME WITH ME?

...EH? ENSOF'S *SHIVERING!*

AHH. ...ER ...

AKIRA ...?!

ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT YOUR DAD? COME ON--WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT ON THE WAY.

UHM...

SORRY! I JUST REMEMBERED SOMETHING I *GOTTA* DO!

WHSHH

HAHH

HAHH

HFF

BRAAAP

I...
I CAN'T
DO IT!

C-
CAN'T...
KEEP...
UP...

HAHH

HAHH

HFF

SKREEEK

PUTT
PUTT
PUTT

HFF

HAAH

BRAAPP

HAAHH

BRAAAPPP

HAHH

HFF

CHAKK

SHIINA... PLEASE *HURRY* ...!

LEFT?!

WHSHH

SHIIN

OH, NO... .....

I'M *LOSING* HIM...

SHSSS

AH...?

FWHSSHH

I'LL GO ON AHEAD!

SHIINA...!

THANK GOD

>HFF<

>HAHH<

>WHEWW<

....
....

IT...
IT WAS
TOO EASY...
WASN'T
IT?

FINDING
HIM...
JUST LIKE
THAT.

!!

S-
SOMEBODY'S...
WATCHING
US?!

GOD... I'VE BEEN PEDALING AN *HOUR* AT LEAST!

DID SHINA *REALLY* KEEP UP WITH HIM ALL THIS WAY...?

I MUST BE CLOSE... THAT LOOKS LIKE THE PLACE ENSOF CAN SEE

JUST A LITTLE FARTHER...

HI, SHIINA.

SLOWWW!!

I... I'M SORRY.

HE WENT IN THERE ...?

YUP. SEE THE SCOOTER?

SO... UM... WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

BARGE RIGHT IN!

HUH ...?!

B-BUT... SHIINA ...!

ffftt

THANKS, HOSHI-MARU.

I'LL NEED YOUR HELP.

SH... SHINA?

AH!
UH...
....

YO!

WELCOME, YOUNG LADIES!

WELL? COME ON IN.

GULP!

YOU WERE CHASING ME... RIGHT?

HE KNEW ...!

YOU, TOO, GIRL. COME ON.

EEP!

SH... SHIINA ...?

B... BUT I... UM...

C'MON!

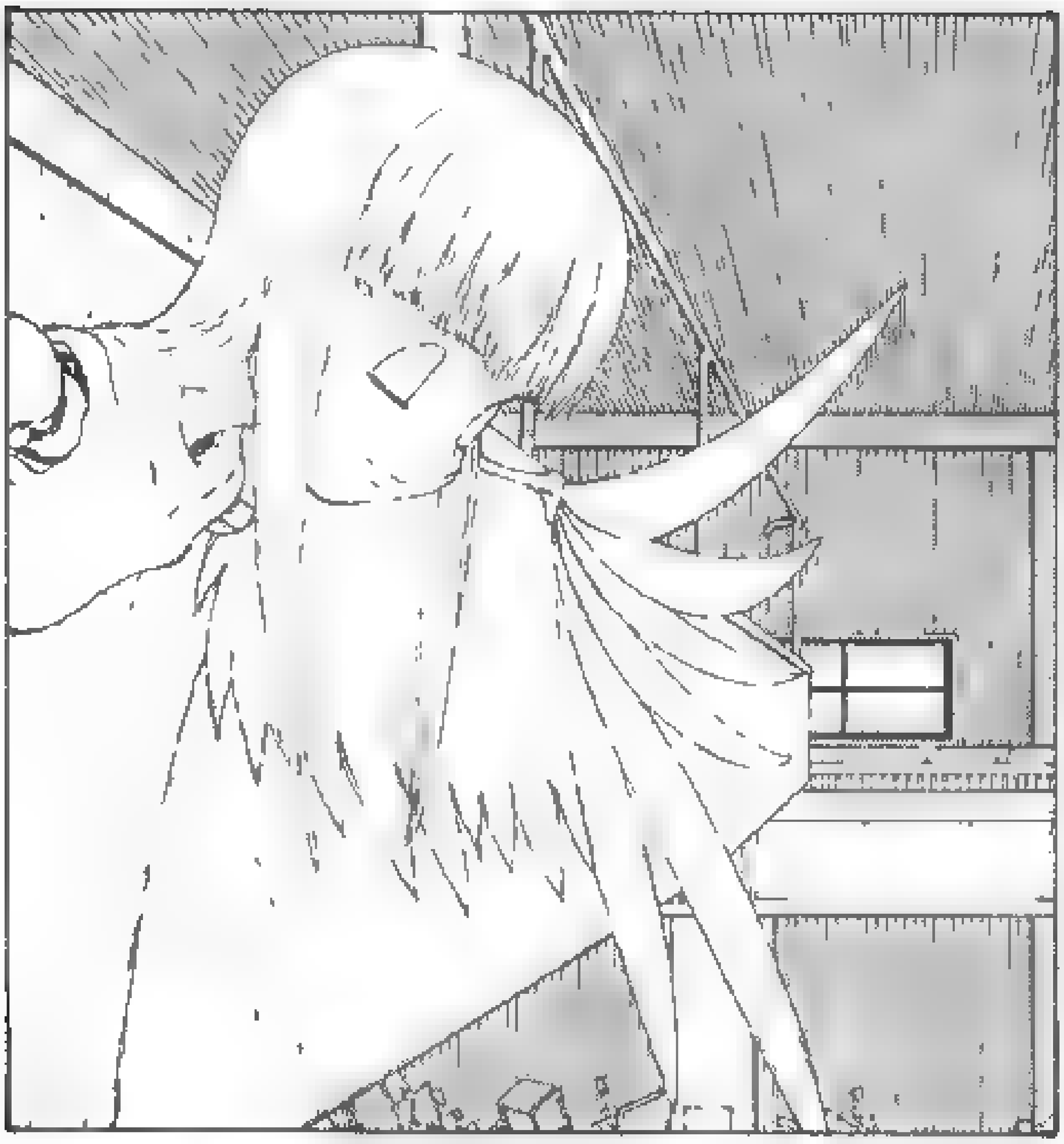
SLAM

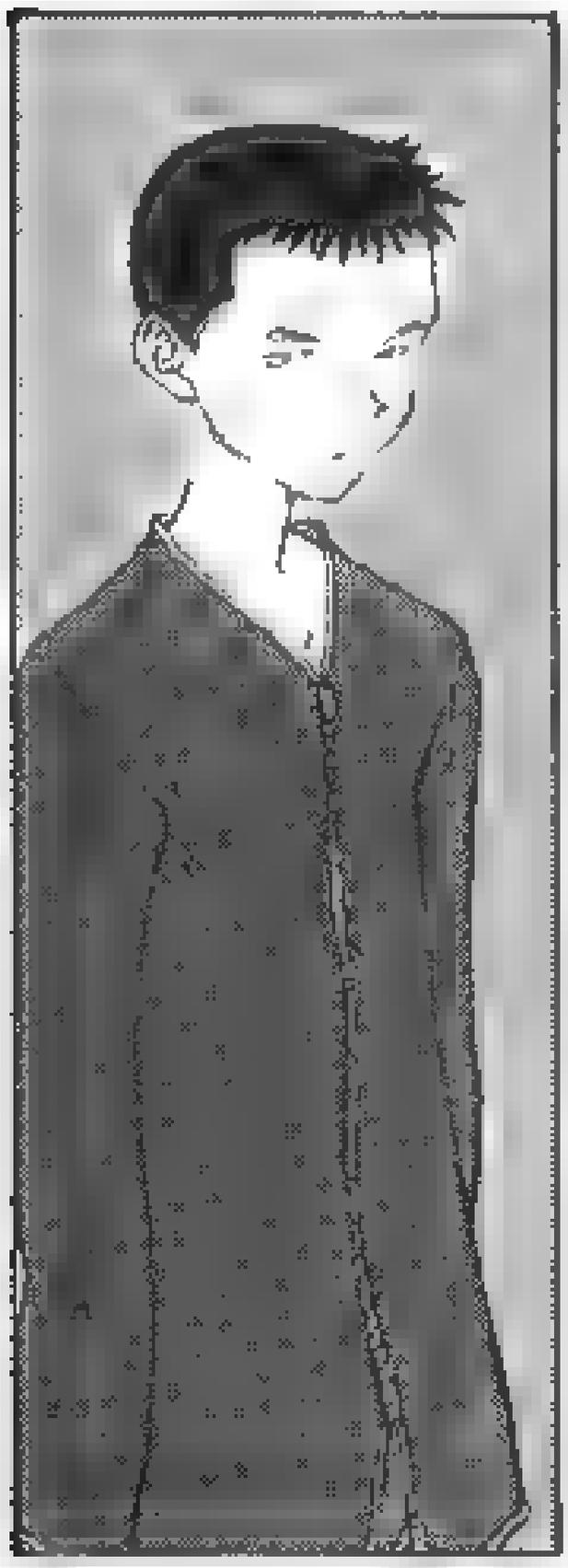
KCHAK

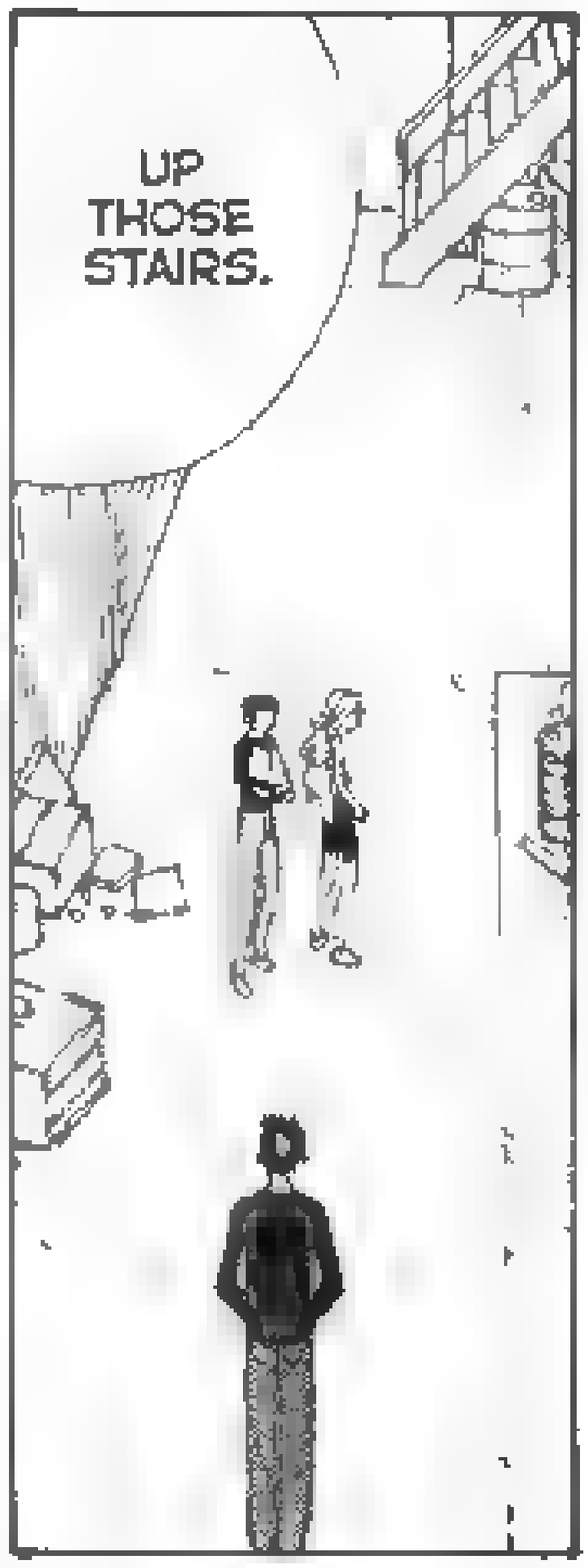
GO ON.

ALL THE WAY TO THE BACK.

SHI...
SHIINA!
OVER
THERE...!






UP
THOSE
STAIRS.

WHOO

AH!

AK RA ..?!

S-SORRY! IT'S JUST... MY LEGS...

I'VE NEVER RIDDEN A BIKE SO FAR...

OH! OH?!

TH...
....

THANK-
Y-YOU.

SO...
WHY ARE YOU HERE?

WHA ...?

URK

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

YOU KNOW DARN WELL!

KNOW WHAT?

UH... YOU KNOW...

ABOUT ...

YOU...
YOU...
.....

DRAGONS!

YOU *HAVE* ONE, RIGHT?!

HUH ...?

AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE A "SECRET ADMIRER" ...!

NO?

IT'S STRANGE... I WOULD HAVE SWORN...

ALTHOUGH YOU ARE A LITTLE YOUNG.

IN THAT CASE... WHAT DO YOU WANT?

ARGH! I TOLD YOU!

DRAGONS!!

"DRAGONS" ...?

YEAH, WE GOT 'EM.

COME ON.

OKAY, BACK DOWN-STAIRS.

WAIT A SEC.

I REALLY GET THE *STRANGEST* FEELING FROM YOU.

AS IF YOU KNOW MORE THAN MOST PEOPLE... SEE MORE...

INTERESTING. HOW OLD ARE YOU? SIXTEEN...?

GRR!

HEH!

AH...?

HEY!

HMPH!

THEN IT *WAS* YOU!

HAH...? WHO ARE YOU?

YEAH, *RIGHT!!* LIKE YOU DON'T *REMEMBER!*

?!? THAT'S A... A *GUY?*

ALL UGLY CHICKS LOOK THE SAME TO ME.

SORRY.

OOH! YOU SAID IT *AGAIN!!*

CUT IT OUT.

THIS GIRL SAYS SHE WANTS TO SEE *DRAGONS.*

DRAGONS?

WE'VE GOT ALL KINDS OF MONSTERS HERE.

AS FOR *DRAGONS*...

THERE ARE SOME LIKE *THIS*.

I MADE THEM MYSELF...

I...
I DON'T MEAN *PUPPETS!*

"PUPPETS" ...?

-SIGHH-

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND *ANYTHING*, DO YOU?

WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER A QUESTION FOR ME...? WHAT'S THAT YOU'VE GOT ON YOUR *BACK?*

HEY!! YOU GUYS *DO* KNOW SOMETHING!!

ABOUT WHAT?

ABOUT... ABOUT...

SOME-THING!!

HMPH. YOU'RE TOO LOW-LEVEL FOR ME.

I DON'T FEEL LIKE TALKING TO YOU ANY MORE.

WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "LOW-LEVEL" ...?!

SH-SHIINA ...?

LOOK...

I TH:NK W-WE SHOULD GO.

WHY? PLENTY OF ROOM HERE... STAY AS LONG AS YOU LIKE!

SHIINA ...?

DO SOMETHING *BAD*... AND YOU'LL BE *SORRY*.

YOU *HEARD* HER.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

SHIINA TAMAI.

AND YOU, GIRL?

I... AH... GOT A NAME?

AKIRA S SAKURA.

MY NAME...

...IS TAKEO TSURU-MARU.

NORIO KOGA.

I DON'T LIKE DOING THINGS THIS WAY.

AND THE PRODUCTION VALUES... EXCESSIVE.

BUT IT WORKED ON THEM, RIGHT?

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

BUT WHAT A DRAG!

ESPECIALLY FOR A KID LIKE THAT.

WELL, I HAD FUN

ALL A MATTER OF *TASTE.*

HMM?

NOW ABOUT THE OTHER GIRL?

AH, MISS AKIRA ...?

YOU SEEMED TO SENSE SOMETHING ABOUT HER.

HUH? D.DN'T YOU?

SHE'S *TIGHTLY BOUND* TO HER DRAGON CHILD.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT *THAT* MEANS... SHE'S GOING TO GROW UP *FAST*.

WE..., AREN'T YOU THE LUCKY ONE!

HEY, *SOMEBODY'S* GOT TO HELP HER DEAL WITH IT!

THE THINGS YOU SAY... YOU NEVER CEASE TO AMAZE ME.

SHE'LL HAVE INTERESTING [redacted] TONIGHT.

HEH, HEH... I'LL SEE TO *THAT*.

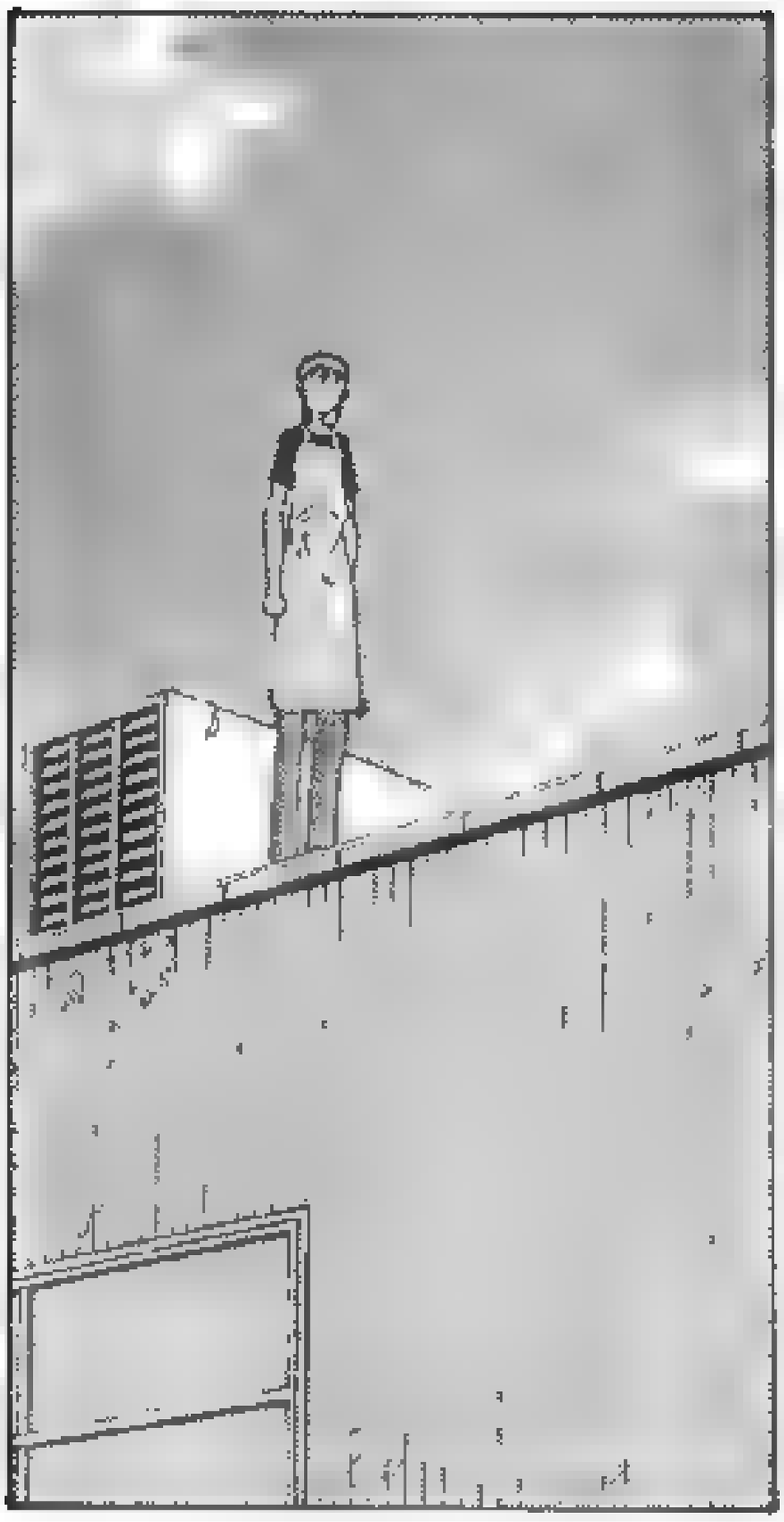
OKAY, I'M OUT OF HERE.

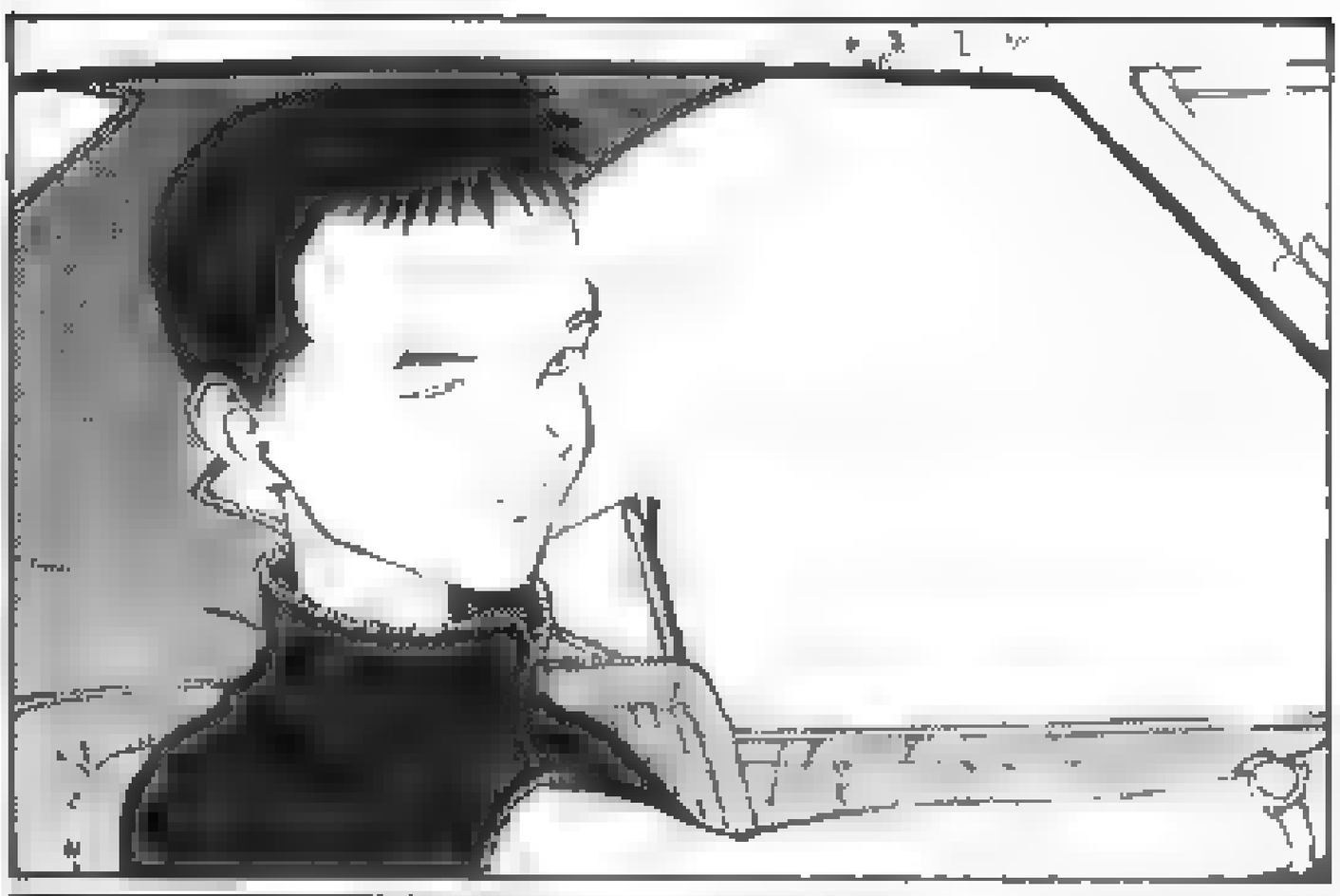
I WON'T BE BACK TONIGHT. YOU HOLD THE FORT.

DRIVING WITHOUT A LICENSE AGAIN?

I'VE *GOT* A LICENSE.

YEAH-- FOR SCOOTERS.





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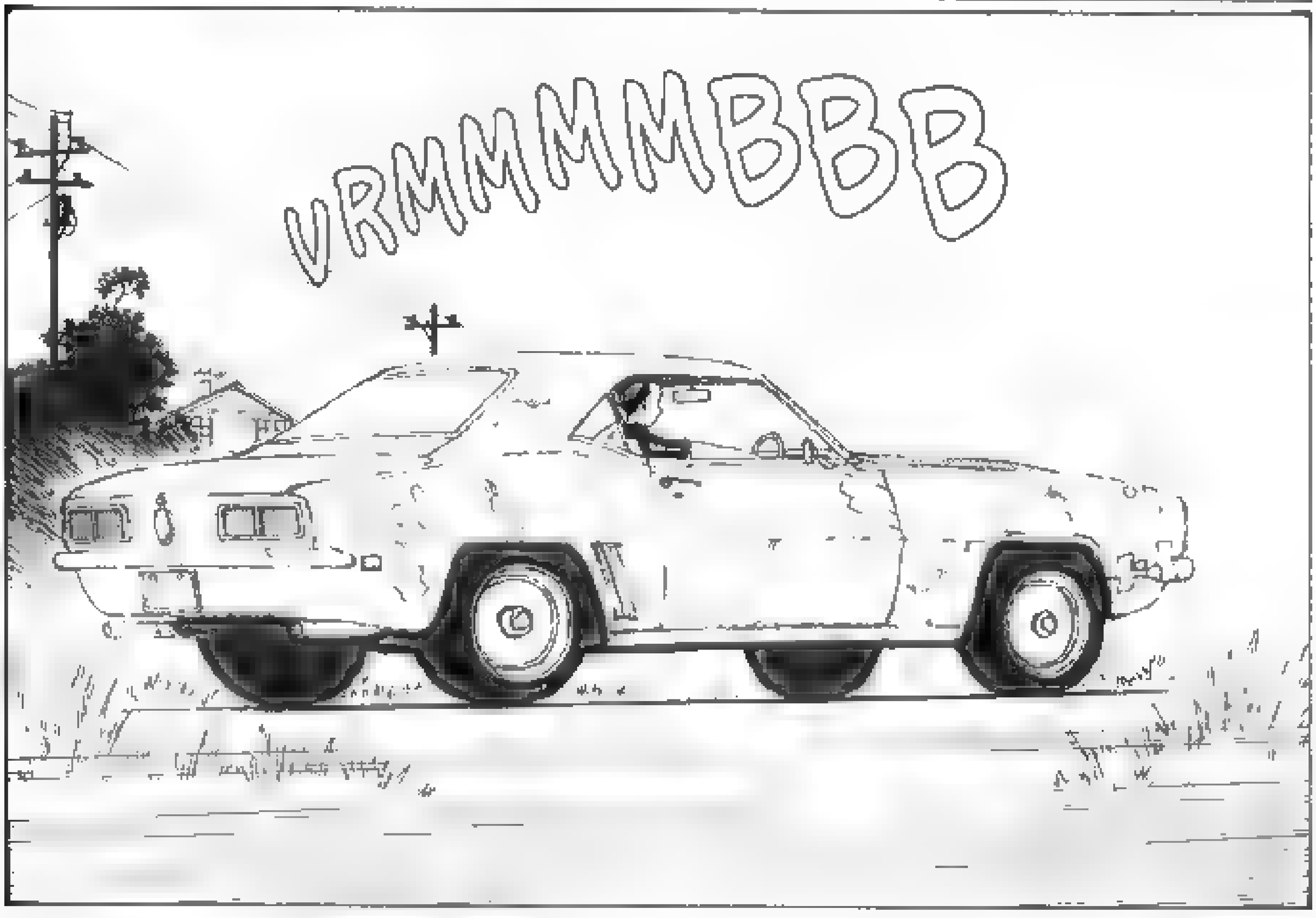
VRMMMBBB

REGARDING KOMORI TOMONORI AND HIS FAMILY

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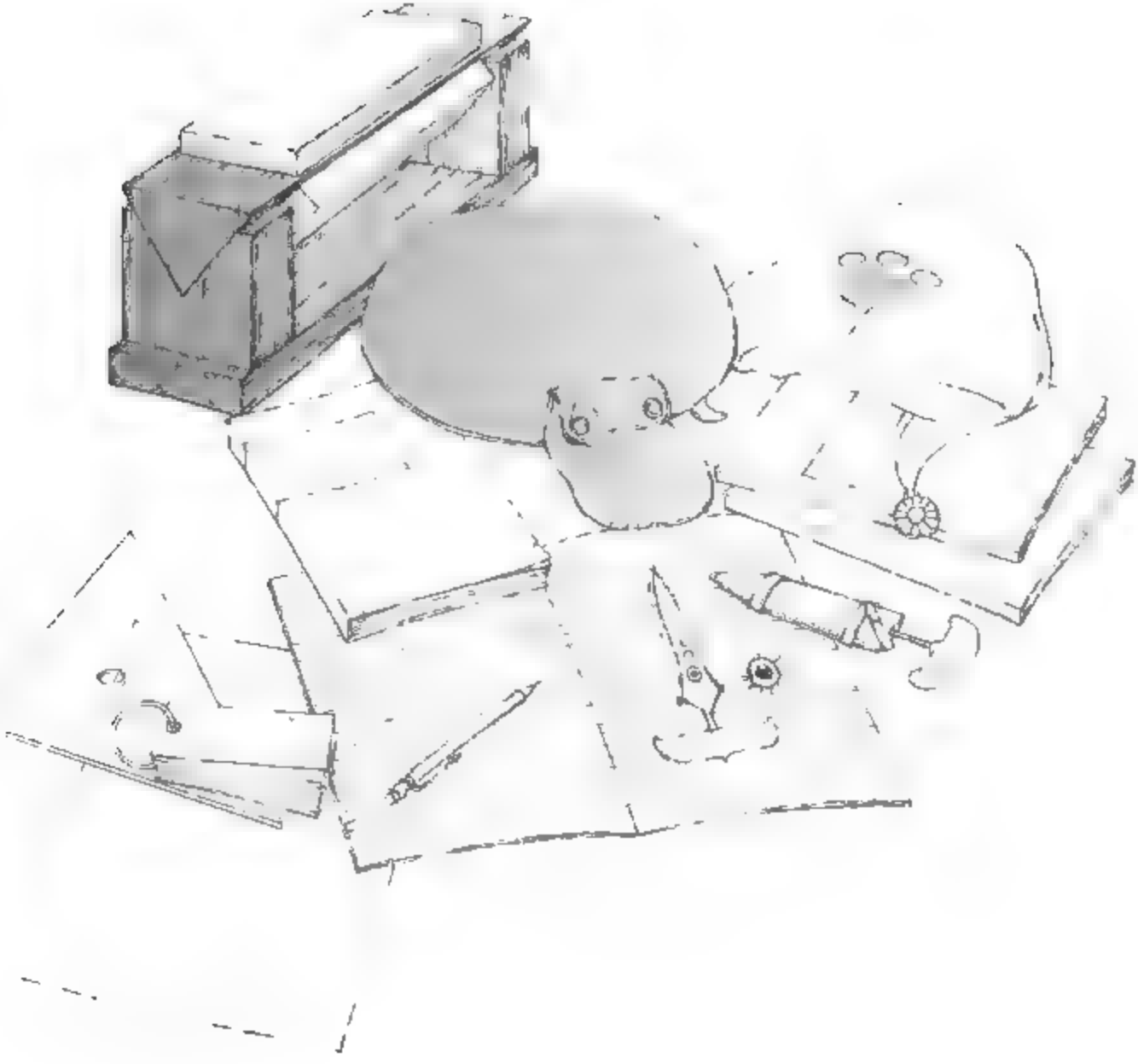


HELLO?

OH, HI, SHIINA. WHAT IS IT?

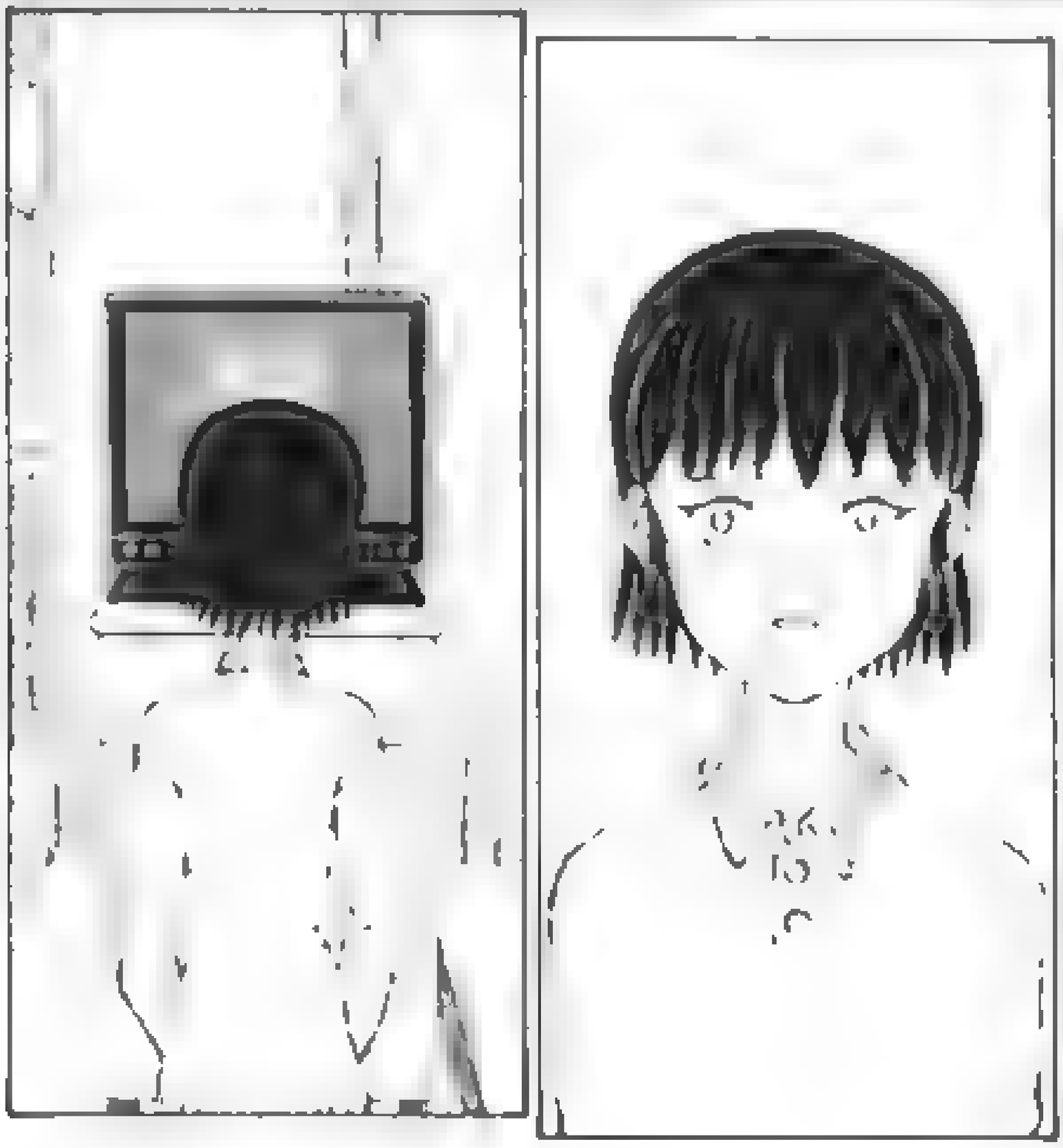
DON'T TELL ME YOU SPENT ALL DAY WATCHING THAT PLACE AGAIN...

HMM?

OH?

ON TV?

RIGHT NOW?!



OH...
OH, NO...
.....

--REPORTING LIVE FROM THE SCENE.

THE BODY WAS FOUND HERE...

...IN THIS UNIT OF A PUBLIC HOUSING COMPLEX LOCATED NEAR THE NISHI-KASAI RESIDENTIAL AREA.

AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT YET CONFIRMED THE IDENTITY OF THE BODY, BUT THE NEIGHBORS HAVE TOLD US THAT THE WOMAN WHO LIVED HERE WAS *AKEMI KOMORI*.

WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT SHE HAD NO WOUNDS OR INJURIES, AND THE POLICE BELIEVE SHE DIED OF MALNUTRITION AND NEGLECT.

THE CORONER HAS ORDERED AN AUTOPSY TO CONFIRM THIS, AND A CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION HAS NOT YET BEEN RULED OUT.

MRS. KOMORI LIVED ALONE WITH HER SCHOOL-AGE SON, *TOMONORI*...

...BUT SHE SUFFERED FROM SEVERE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DISABILITIES AND RARELY LEFT THE HOUSE.

TOMONORI HAD BEEN TAKING CARE OF HER.

HOW-EVER...

...IT HAS NOW BECOME APPARENT THAT TOMONORI HAS BEEN MISSING SINCE AT LEAST THE END OF SUMMER VACATION.

THE SCHOOL BOARD HAS VERIFIED THAT HE HAS NOT ATTENDED ANY CLASSES SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.

THE POLICE ARE MOBILIZING A SEARCH EFFORT.

EARLIER TODAY WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY, AND WITH TOMONORI'S SCHOOL-MATES...

OH YES, *THAT* BOY!

HE WAS SUCH A NICE YOUNG MAN, VERY FOND OF HIS MOTHER.

YEAH, HE SHOPPED HERE ALMOST EVERY DAY.

HE WAS REAL POLITE... RARE IN A KID NOWA-DAYS, EH?

AKEM WAS ON FULL DISABILITY, AND THE BOY WASN'T THAT HEALTHY, EITHER...MAYBE AN INHERITED PROBLEM?

OH, YEAH, WE WERE LIKE, *REALLY* WORRIED!

HE WAS SUPER POPULAR WITH THE GIRLS, Y'KNOW?

'CAUSE HE WAS ALWAYS SO SWEET AND CONSID-ERATE AND STUFF.

AND LIKE, Y'KNOW, THAT "POOR, SICK BOY" THING...? IT WAS KINDA NEAT...

MAN, HE WAS SMART... *REALLY* SMART.

HE WAS PROBABLY THE SMART-EST KID IN OUR GRADE. NO, I MEAN FOR *REAL!*

HE SAID HE WAS GONNA BE A DOCTOR.

AND WITH HIS BRAIN, WE FIGURED, *NO PROBLEM*, MAN!

YEAH!

GEEZ... *EVERYBODY* LIKED HIM. THIS IS A REAL DRAG...

POLICE ARE SEEKING *ANY* INFORMATION...

...ON THE BOY'S WHEREABOUTS AS THEY INVESTIGATE THIS TRAGIC INCIDENT.

IF YOU HAVE SEEN THIS YOUNG MAN, OR HAVE ANY OTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL POLICE HEADQUARTERS AND ASK FOR DETECTIVE KIKUNI.

IT IS A TRAGIC COMMENTARY ON THE ISOLATING NATURE OF OUR SOCIETY AND EVEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES TODAY THAT AKEMI'S BODY REMAINED UNDISCOVERED IN THIS APARTMENT...

...UNTIL HER SON'S ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL PROMPTED A VISIT FROM THE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES. THIS IS JUNKO MIZUNO, REPORTING FROM NISHI-KASAI...

NEXT UP, WE'LL BE LOOKING AT THE CURRENT--

--POLICE HAVE INITIATED A SEARCH FOR THE BOY--

--MISSING SINCE AT LEAST LATE AUGUST, ALTHOUGH THERE IS YET NO EVIDENCE OF--

--REALLY LOVED HIS MOTHER--

--HEALTH PROBLEMS HIMSELF--

--DISABLED MOTHER RELIED ON HIM FOR EVERY--

--HAD NO OTHER RESPONSIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS. HIS FATHER--

--WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR--

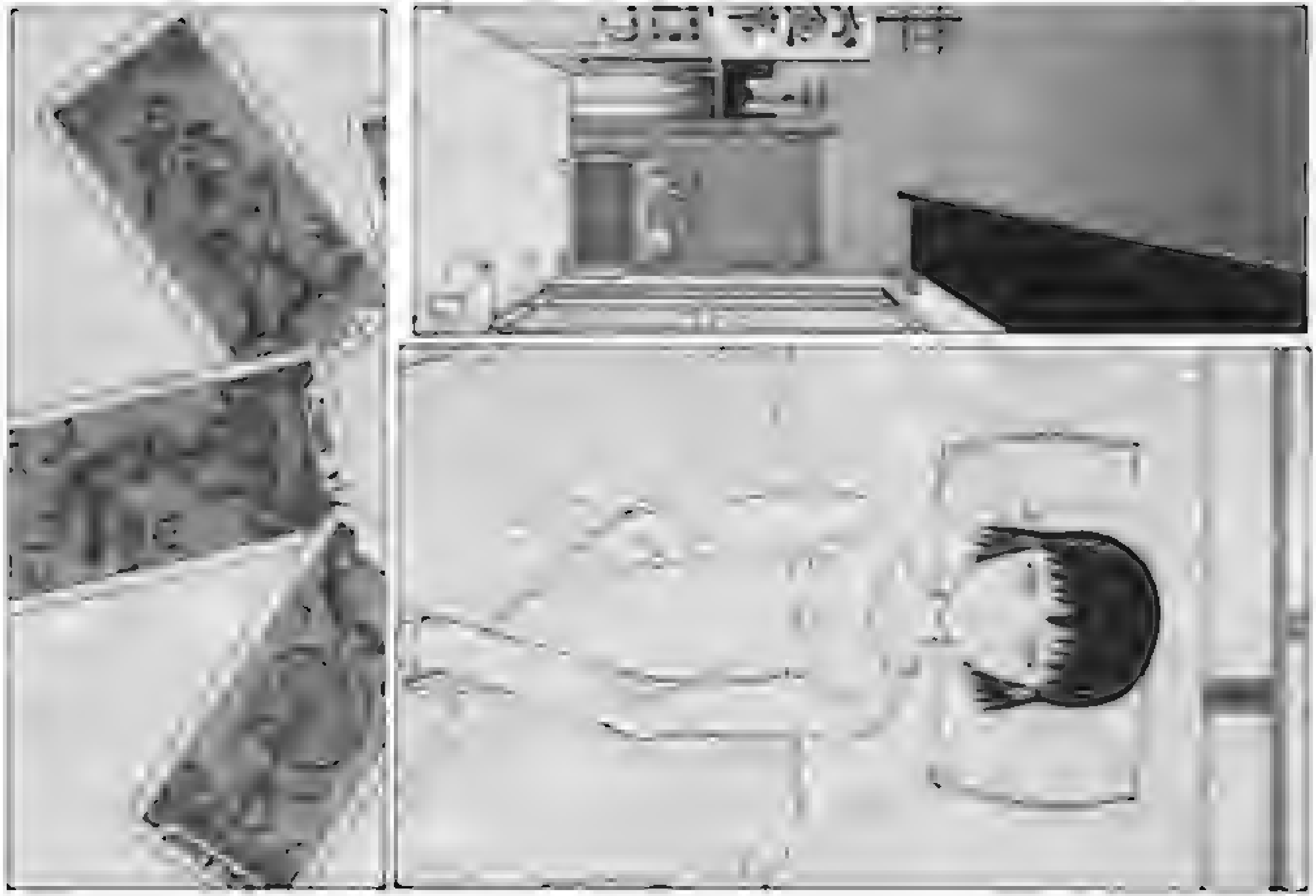
--MOTHER APPARENTLY STARVED TO DEATH WHEN HE DID NOT--

WE'LL KEEP A FEW PEOPLE AROUND, BUT MOST OF 'EM WILL DIE.

EVEN DOCTORS... ANYBODY WHO NEEDS A DOCTOR TO SURVIVE IS TOO WIMPY TO LIVE, ANYWAY.

BUT WHAT WE'LL HAVE IN THE END...

...IS A HEALTHY SOCIETY. A PURE SOCIETY!



KCHAK

GOOD MORNING, DEAR! ♥

DO YOU HAVE TIME FOR BREAK-FAST...?

UM.. N-NO.

AND... UH, I'M GOING OUT TODAY, SO...

BUT, AKIRA... SCHOOL?

I...I REALLY WILL START GOING AGAIN... TOMORROW.

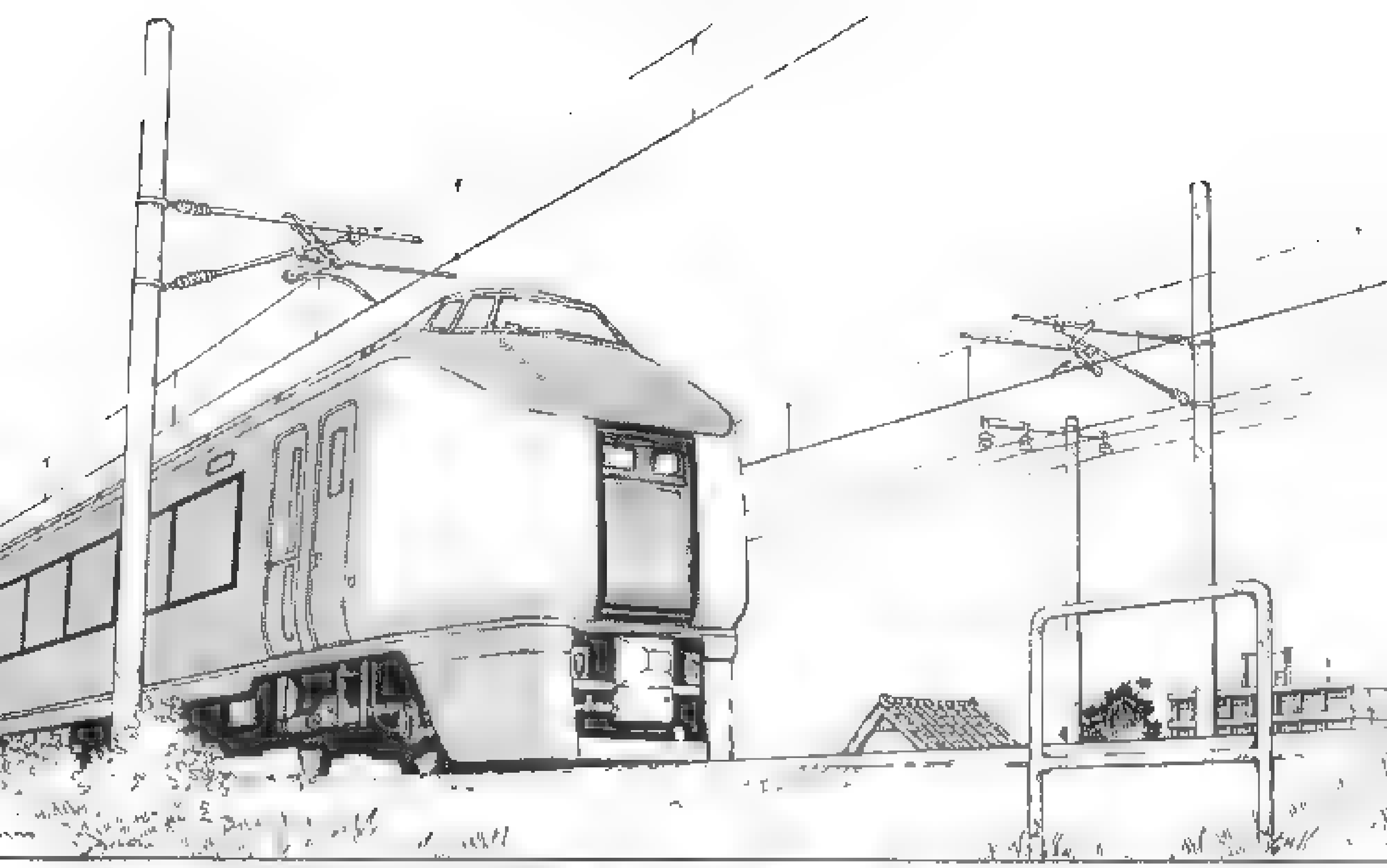
HOW ABOUT SHIINA?

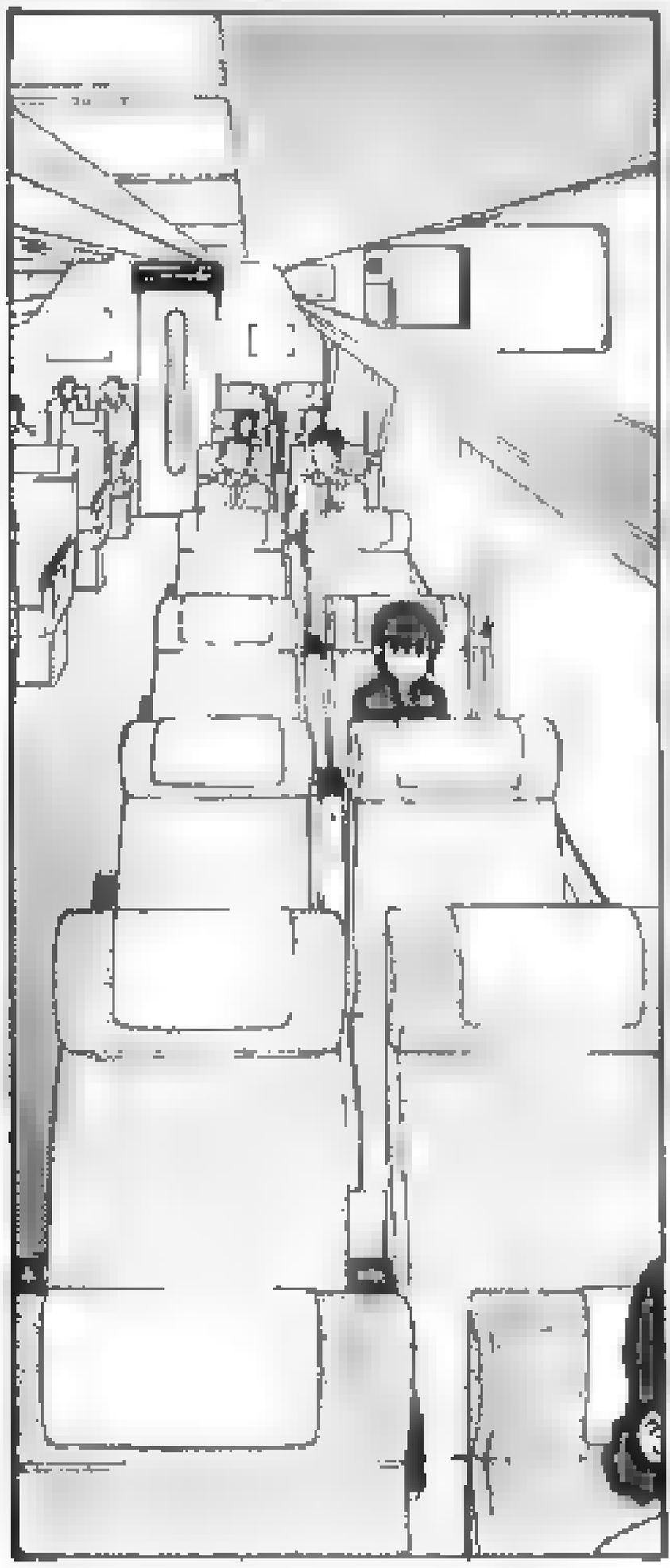
IS SHE GO.NG WITH YOU TODAY?

N-NO. SHE, UM...HAS SCHOOL...

WILL YOU BE OKAY?

Y...YES.





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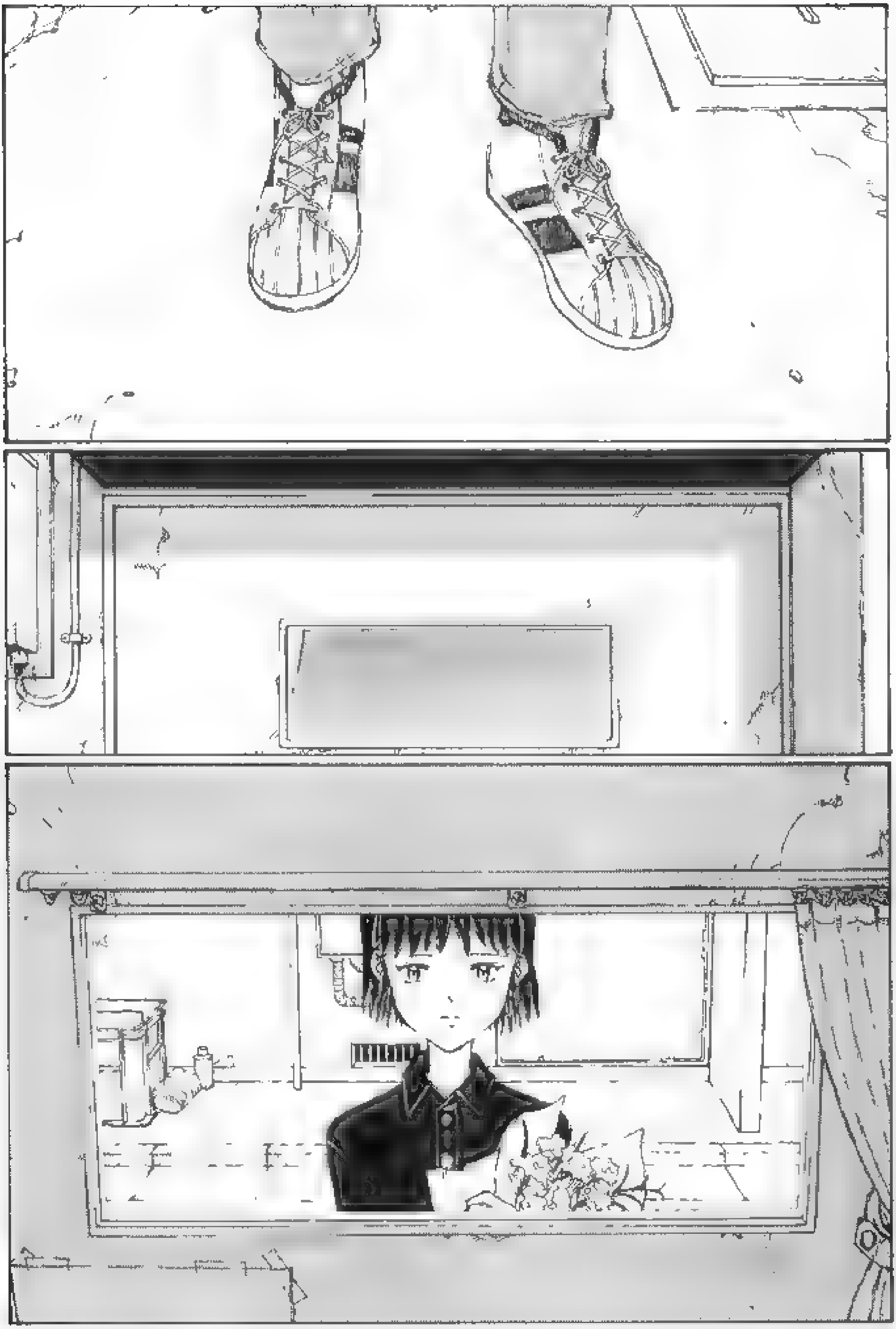
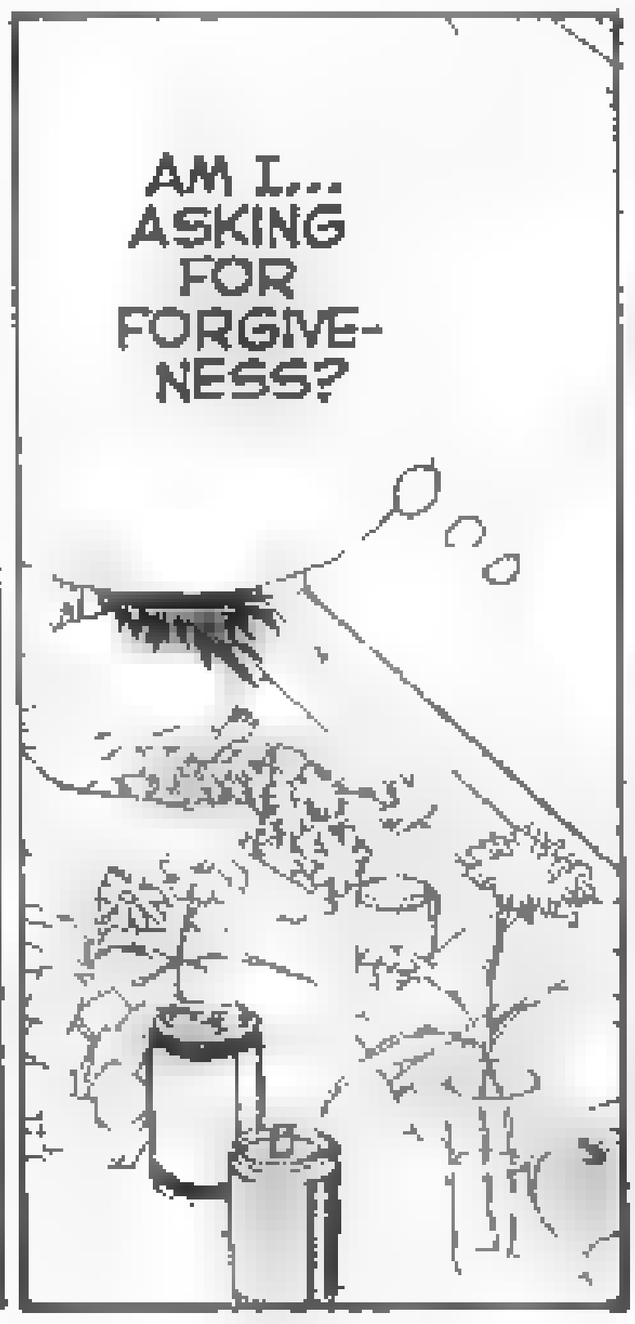


....
....
WHAT AM I DOING?


AM I... ASKING FOR FORGIVE-NESS?

DO I EVEN HAVE THAT *RIGHT* ...?

SINGLE VISITOR. FEMALE.

LOW TO MID TEENS.

A CLASS-MATE ...?

I'M CHECKING HER OUT NOW.

.....

MAYBE... BUT TO TELL THE TRUTH, I'M NOT SURE.

THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME IN THESE LOUSY SCHOOL PHOTOS_

SHALL WE TAKE HER INTO CUSTODY ...?

.....

.....

"NO. LET'S WATCH AWHILE."

"ROGER."

SIR?

HERE COMES A BOY.

MEET-ING HER?

SWITCH ON THE MIKE.

SO...
.....

ARE YOU A FRIEND OF HIS, TOO?

AH ...?!

UM...

S... SORT OF.

WELL, YOU MUST HAVE HAD *SOME* REASON TO SKIP SCHOOL AND COME HERE.

BUT...

...*WHATEVER* REASON YOU HAVE, IT WASN'T VERY BRIGHT TO JUST WALK RIGHT UP TO THE DOOR HERE IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.

YOU SEE...

BIG, SCARY GROWN-UPS ARE JUST *WAITING* TO GRAB YOU...

...AND TAKE YOU AWAY FOR... *QUESTIONING.*

THEY'LL WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE, WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT TOMONORI.

AND THAT WOULD BE A *PROB-LEM*... WOULDN'T IT?

COME ON. THE POLICE WILL BE HERE ANY SECOND.

LET'S GO.

B-BUT... .....

DO YOU *WANT* TO STAND HERE AND LET A BUNCH OF NASTY OLD MEN LOOK AT YOU WITH THEIR LITTLE SPY CAMERAS?

COME WITH ME.

HOW THE HELL DOES HE *KNOW* ABOUT US?!

SEND IN AN OFFICER!

THERE SHOULD BE SOMEONE ON PATROL NEARBY.

AND TELL THE STANDBY UNIT TO PREPARE TO TAIL THEM!

DON'T WASTE TIME, GIRL!

OKAY— GET IN.

HEH...
.....

ARE YOU *AFRAID* OF ME ...?

BTAM

BTAM

BRMBB

AW, CRAP! A CAR!

VRMBBBB

SIR? THE TARGETS ARE IN A CAR. LATE MODEL, WHITE, TWO-DOOR COUPE.

I'M IN PURSUIT.

GET A POSITIVE MAKE ON THE CAR, AND *DON'T* LET THEM SHAKE YOU!

BACK-UP IS ON THE WAY.

THIS MAY BE GOOD.

THEY MIGHT LEAD US TO OTHERS.

IT'S JUST A HUNCH, BUT...

...I THINK WE'VE FINALLY STRUCK GOLD WITH THESE TWO.

I'M NAOZUMI SUDŌ.

TOMONORI AND I MET DOING... VOLUNTEER WORK.

....
....

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO SAY, THAT'S OKAY. I DON'T REALLY MIND.

N- NO...I DIDN'T MEAN... UM...

I'M SORRY.

MY NAME IS *AKIRA*. AKIRA S... SAKURA.

AND I... WE...

UM... .....

PEN PALS!

WE WERE *PEN PALS!!*

J- JUST FOR A BIT.

REALLY... THAT SOUNDS LIKE HIM.

HE WAS A GOOD WRITER, TOO... WASN'T HE?

AKIRA ...?

WH—

WHAT?!

WHERE DO YOU LIVE? I'LL DRIVE YOU HOME.

EH?

OH, NO... TH- THAT'S OKAY.

IT'S KIND OF FAR.

NO PROBLEM. REALLY.

B... BUT... .....

I SAID IT'S NO PROBLEM.

LOOK-- AM I BOTHERING YOU?

UM... N NO.

THEN LET'S GO, OKAY?

VRMBBBB

HEY, CHECK OUT THAT LICENSE PLATE! LOOKS LIKE *U.S. ARMY* TAGS!!

PROBABLY A STOLEN CAR.

I'LL RUN A CHECK.

ISN'T IT KIND OF ASKING FOR TROUBLE TO STEAL A CAR FROM THE U.S. MILITARY...?

.....
.....

EITHER HE'S A REAL *IDIOT*...

...OR ELSE HE'S *BAD NEWS.*

REALLY? YOU'RE IN EIGHTH GRADE, AKIRA?

YOU LOOK OLDER.

UM... Y-YES.

THE SAME GRADE HE WAS IN...

I SEE. THAT MAKES SENSE.

UHM... NAO...

NAOZUMI? WHAT G-GRADE ARE YOU IN?

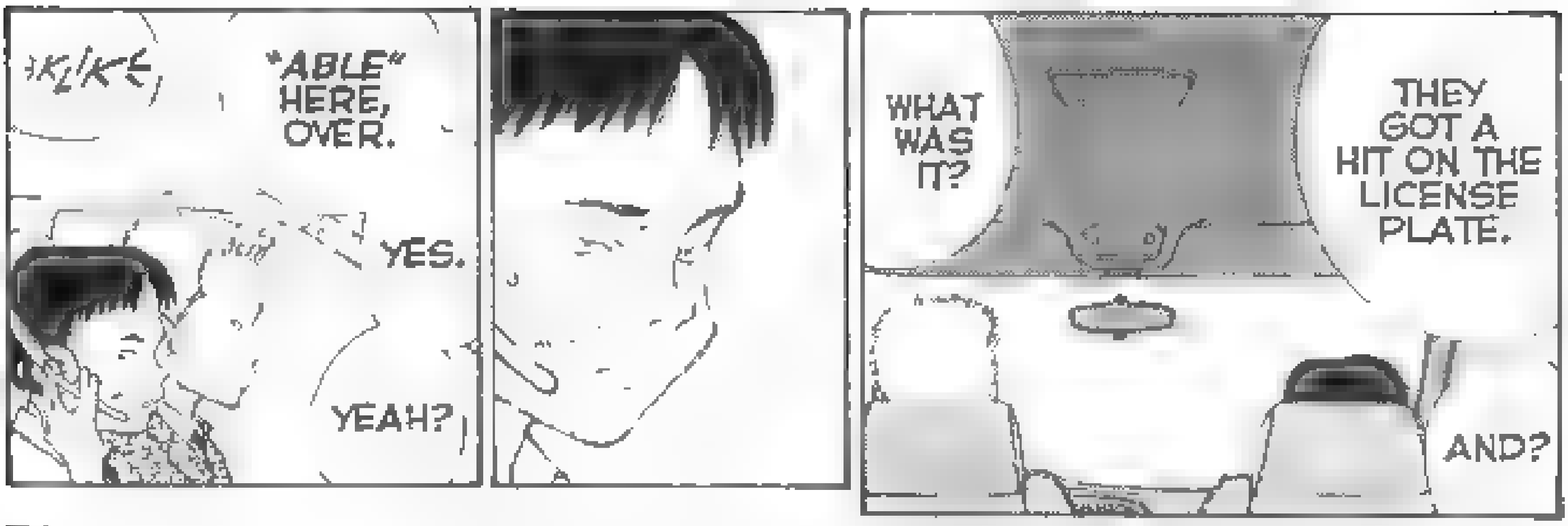
ME ...?

WHY? HOW OLD DO I LOOK ...?

SORRY. THAT WASN'T NICE.

I'M A JUNIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL.

BUT I FLUNKED AND GOT HELD BACK A YEAR.


MIKE
"ABLE" HERE, OVER.
YES.
YEAH?
WHAT WAS IT?
THEY GOT A HIT ON THE LICENSE PLATE.
AND?
IT'S FROM THE ATSUGI NAVAL AIR STATION. U.S. MILITARY, LIKE I THOUGHT. BUT GET THIS--
--IT'S THE BASE COMMANDER'S PRIVATE VEHICLE!
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?
IS THAT KID YANKING OUR CHAIN OR WHAT? STOLEN PLATE?
NOPE. IT'S THE RIGHT MODEL OF CAR.

TARGET "MIKE" IS GETTING ON THE TURNPIKE.

THE *TURN-PIKE?*

WHAT'S HE PLAYING AT?

HE MUSTN'T HAVE NOTICED HE'S BEING FOLLOWED, OR DIDN'T EXPECT IT.

THERE AREN'T ANY EXITS OFF THAT SECTION OF THE 'PIKE FOR SEVERAL MILES.

EITHER HE'S NOT THINK-ING...

...OR HE'S *UP* TO SOME-THING...

HOW TO HANDLE THIS ...?

UNIT *"BAKER"* HERE. WE'VE RENDEZ-VOUSED WITH *ABLE*, OVER.

VRMBBB

ROGER, *BAKER*. OKAY— OVERTAKE AND PASS *MIKE*. BOX HIM IN.

TIME TO PULL THEM OVER AND SEE WHAT'S UP.

YOU'RE KIDDING. *FLOWERS* ...?

YOU CAME ALL THE WAY THERE TO LEAVE *FLOWERS*?

YOU KNOW...

"...FLOWERS ARE NO USE TO THE *DEAD.*"

CORPSES... THROW THEM IN THE GARBAGE, KICK THEM, BURN THEM...

...STUFF THEM IN A GOLDEN COFFIN.

NONE OF THAT MEANS *ANYTHING* TO THE DEAD.

H-HOW CAN YOU--

"FLOWERS...

"...ARE NOT FOR THE DEAD."

THEY ARE FOR THE PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND.

DEATH.

IT HAS NO MEANING TO THE INDIVIDUAL INVOLVED...

...FROM THE INSTANT IT IS *IMPLE-MENTED.*

THE CONCLUSION OF THEIR EXISTENCE ONLY HAS IMPORTANCE...

...IN THE MINDS OF THOSE WHO LIVE ON.

I...
....

I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

N-NAO-ZUMI ...?

WHY WERE YOU THERE?

WHAT REASON DID Y-YOU HAVE...

THAT WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO RISK C-COMING?

ARE YOU ONE WHO WAS...

...LEFT BEHIND?

NOW, WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT? I DON'T RECALL HEARING ANY PROOF THAT TOMONORI IS *DEAD.*

HAVE *YOU,* AKIRA?

THE FACT THAT HIS *MOTHER* DIED IS OF NO INTEREST TO ME AT ALL.

THE TRUTH IS I HAVE NO IDEA WHY HE'S GONE MISSING.

HOWEVER, I HAVE MY REASONS WHY...

...I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE YOU IN THE HANDS OF THOSE *MEDDLESOME* GROWNUPS.

UNIT *BAKER'S* IN FRONT OF *MIKE.*

OKAY, PUT ON THE SQUEEZE.

WHSSH

KTAK

YOU IN THE *WHITE* CAR!

REDUCE *SPEED* AND PULL OVER TO THE SHOULDER!

OH?! OH, GOD !!

WHAT A WASTE OF TIME.

WEEOOOUUUU

OH, WELL. CAN'T BE HELPED.

FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT, AKIRA.

WHAT ...?!

I DON'T HAVE A DRIVER'S LICENSE.

VRMBB

HEY?!

VRMBB!!

WEEOOOUUUU

DON'T EVEN TRY IT, PUNK!!

TARGET *MIKE* IS ON THE RUN!!

BAKER, PULL AHEAD AND SET UP A ROAD-BLOCK!!

BAKER !?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? *MOVE!!*

MIKE IS OVER-TAKING YOU!

UH... ABLE ...?

HE... HE'S... .....

ABLE... TARGET MIKE IS AHEAD OF US!!

WHAT!?

SKREEEEEE

HOLY SHIT!!

SKRASSH

VARMBBAMM

SKREEE

WHAT THE *HELL?!*

SKREEEEEEE

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? HOW DID--

KCHAK

H-HUH ...?!

AH...? B-BUT... NAOZUMI ...?

THEY CRASHED!

NOT VERY GOOD DRIVERS, ARE THEY?

WH- WHERE'S THE *DRIVER?* WHAT IS *THAT?!*

STAY IN YOUR CARS!

FLOOD

?!
HEY--

BRITT

BOMPH

NNG...

SHIT!

SPAK

SPAK

BRRTTT

TTTT

AAH!

WHAT?!

ARE... ARE YOU OKAY?

YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU WERE... IN *PAIN.*

I'M OKAY.

AND YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD *YOURSELF,* AKIRA.

SORRY. I DID IT AGAIN.

I'LL PULL OVER AT THE NEXT SERVICE AREA, OKAY?

UM... N-NAO-ZUMI?

I... UM...

P- PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME BEHIND.

PLEASE!

YOU'RE REALLY WORRIED ABOUT THAT?

WELL, FORGET IT. RELAX, AKIRA.

I...I DON'T GET IT.

USUALLY GUYS MAKE ME SO NERVOUS.

BUT SOMEHOW, HE'S *DIFFERENT.* IT REALLY FEELS LIKE... LIKE HE'S HERE TO *PROTECT* ME.

HMM...? WHERE'D HE GO?

AKIRA... OVER HERE.

DON'T WORRY.

I DIDN'T REALLY *STEAL* IT.

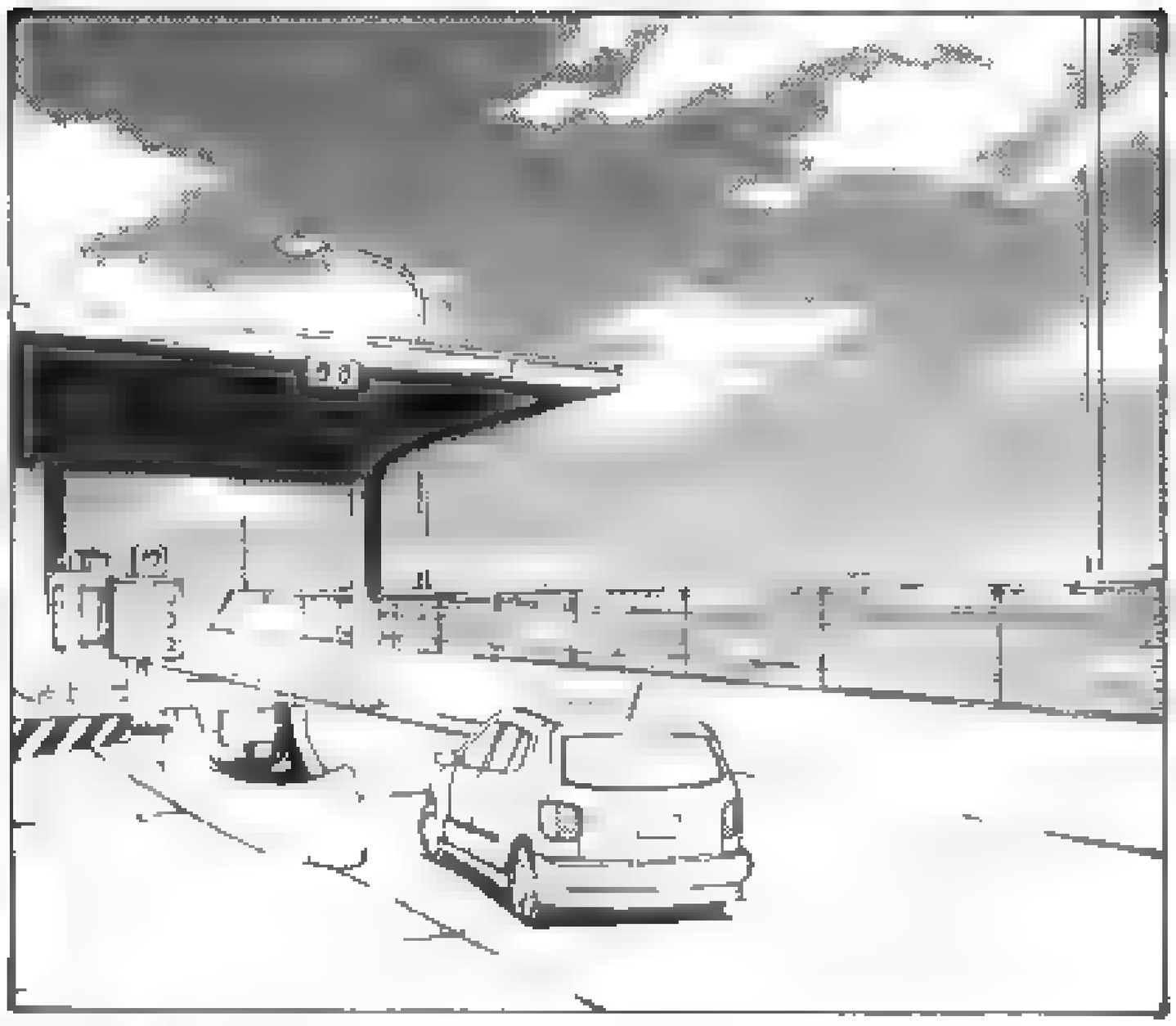
LET'S GO.

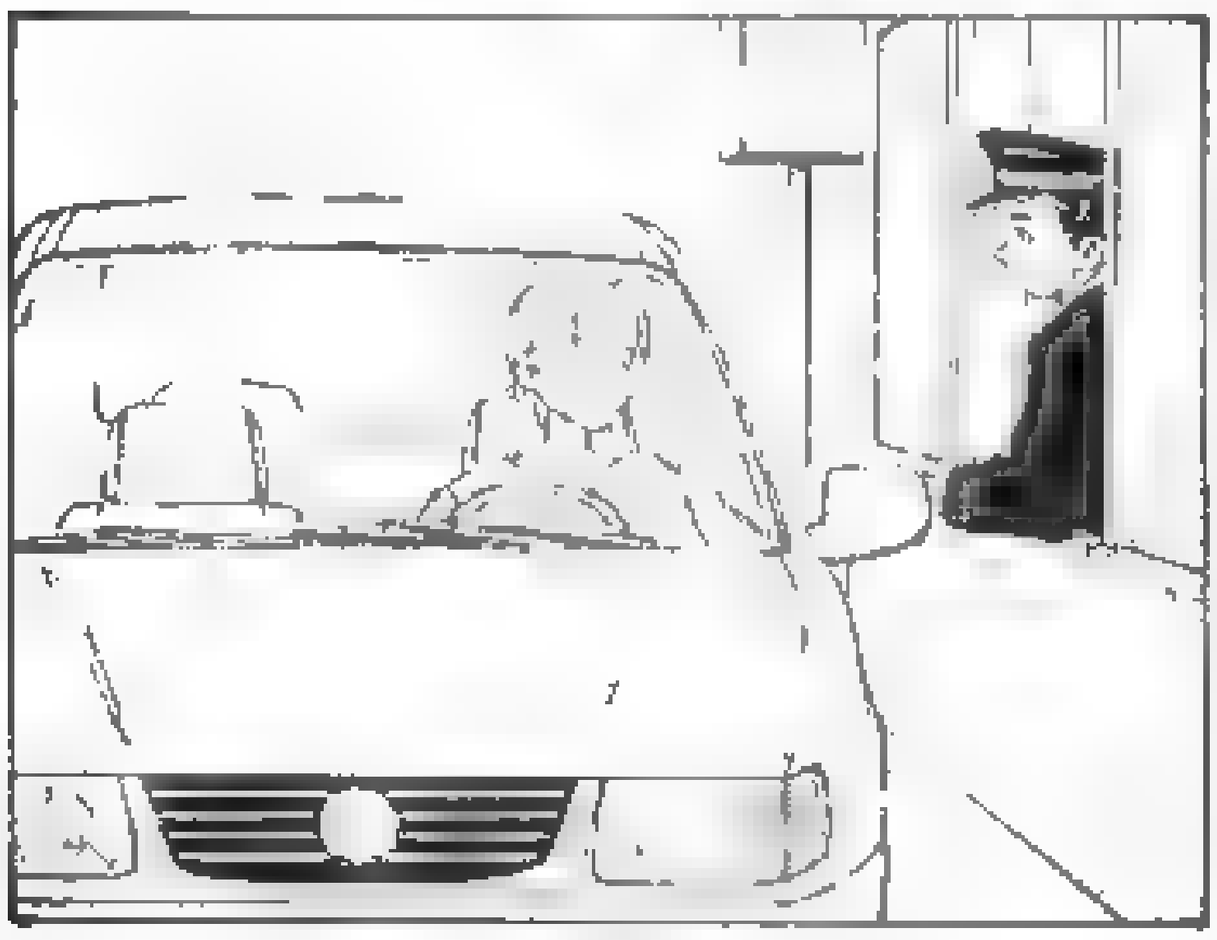
UH... UH... THAT CAR...

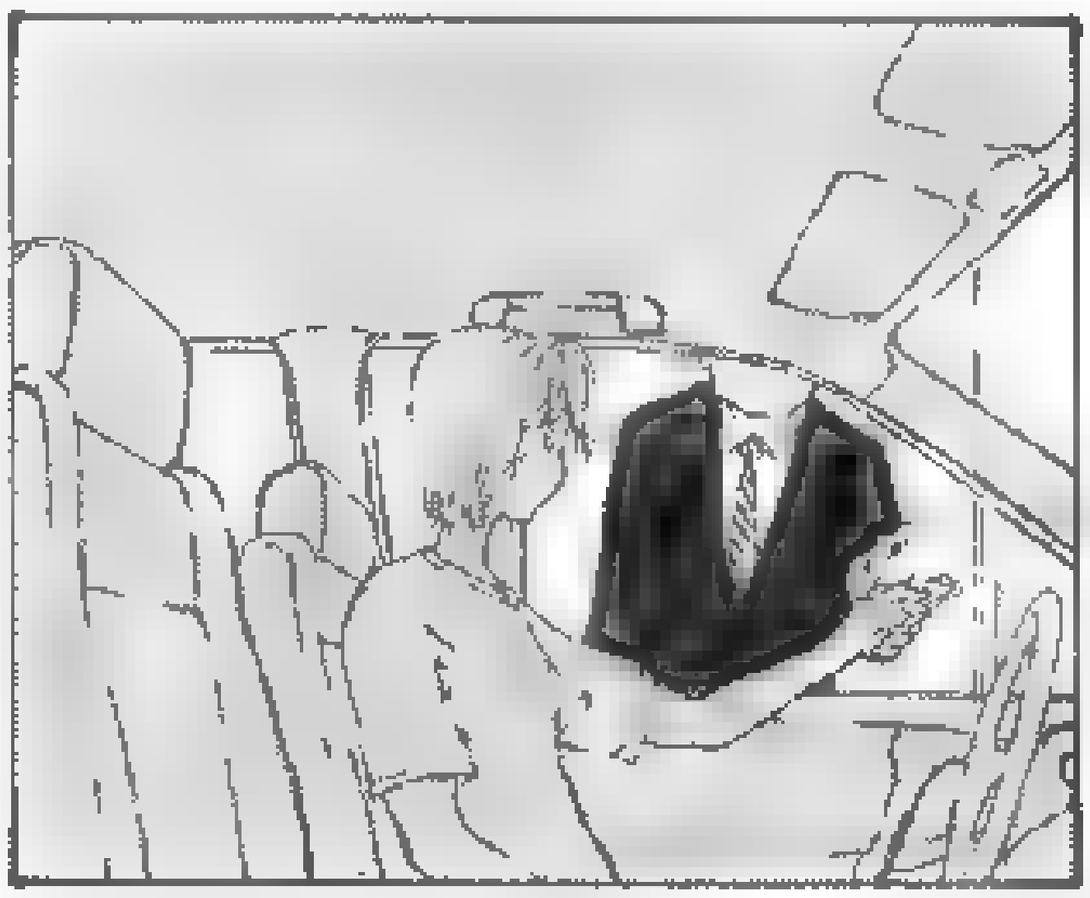
NO, WAIT.

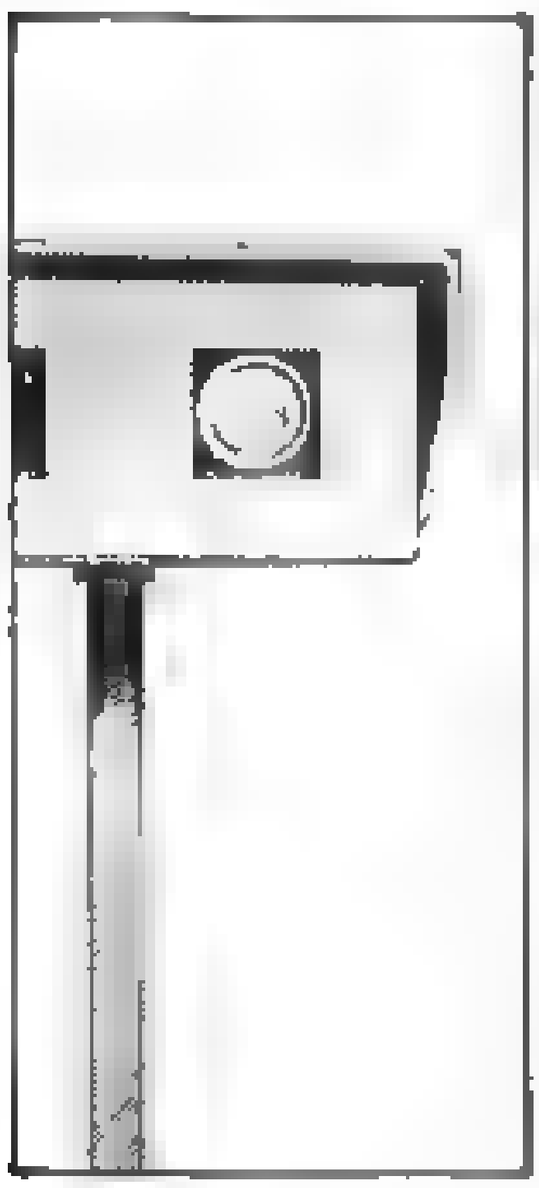
ON SECOND THOUGHT, DON'T GET IN.

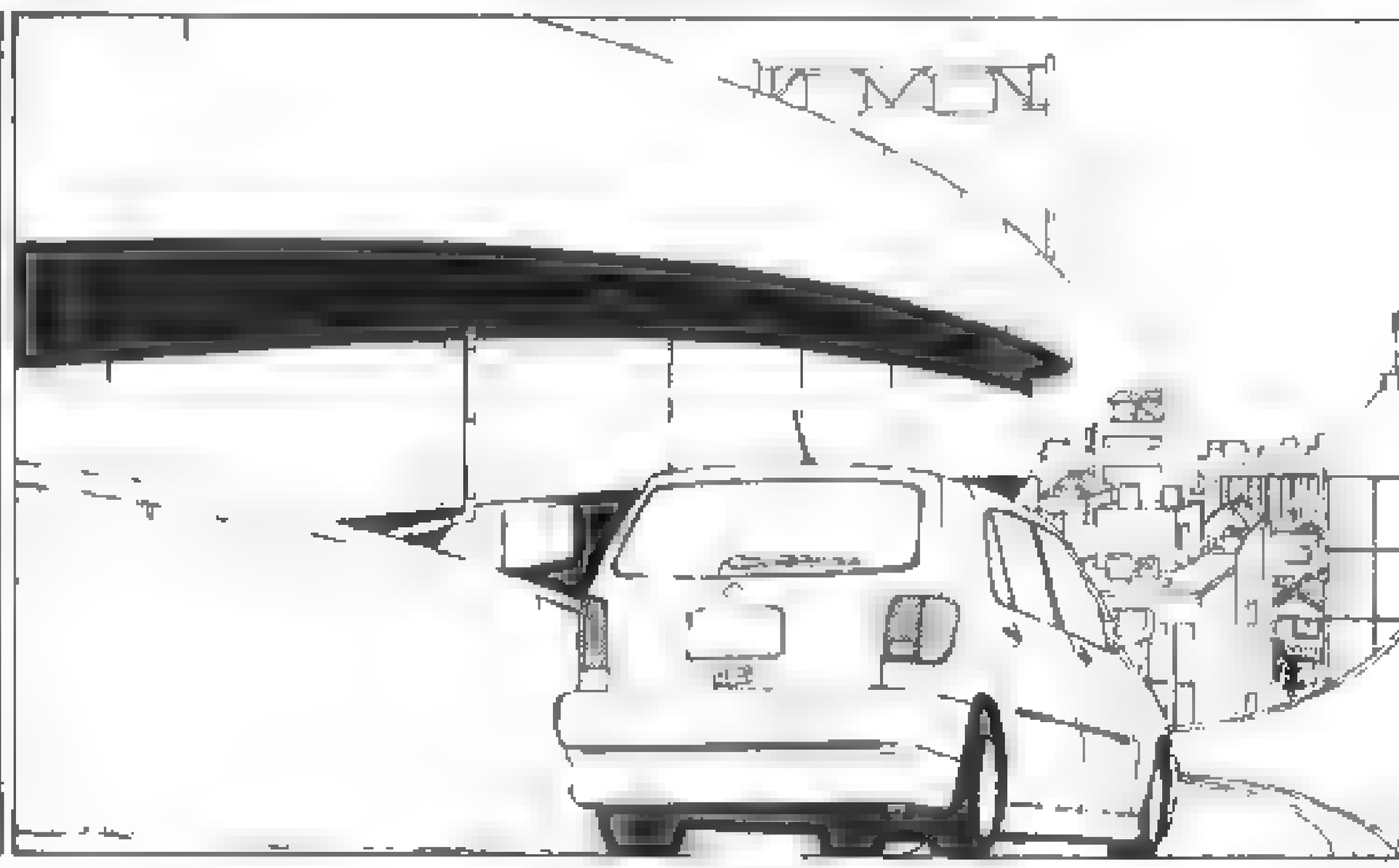
B-
BUT...
....?











SORRY ABOUT THAT.

NAO-ZUMI...

I DON'T UNDER-STAND. WHAT SORT OF PERSON *ARE* YOU?

MALE, EIGHT-EEN.

I DIDN'T MEAN *THAT*.

YOU *REALLY* WANT TO KNOW?

"I AM A GUARDIAN ...

"...OF THE *EARTH.*"

HEE, HEE!

COME ON, AKIRA... IT'S *TRUE*.

HEE HEE

ON THE ROAD

"Manga-Sketchbook@MircX & MangaWorld

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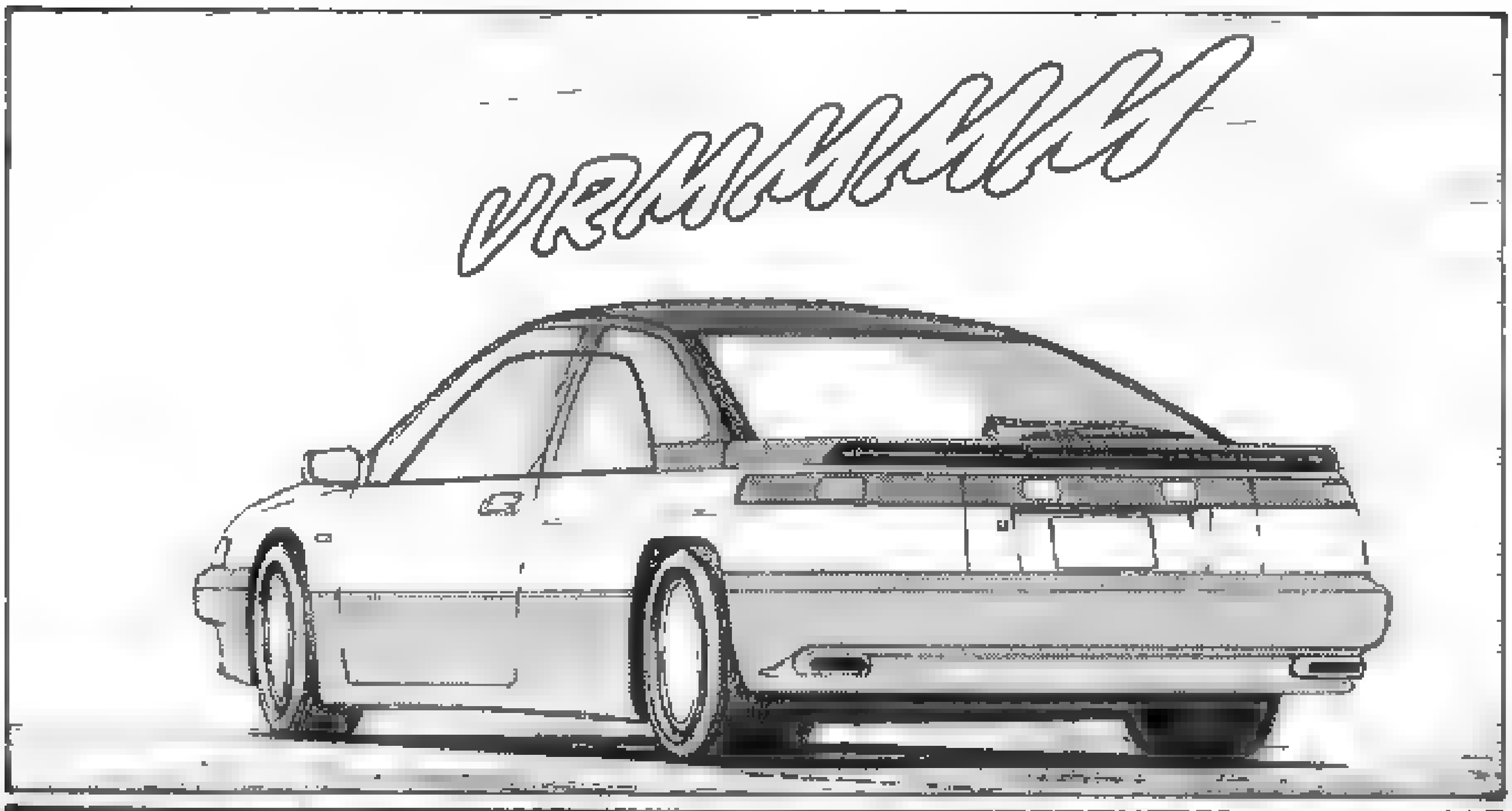
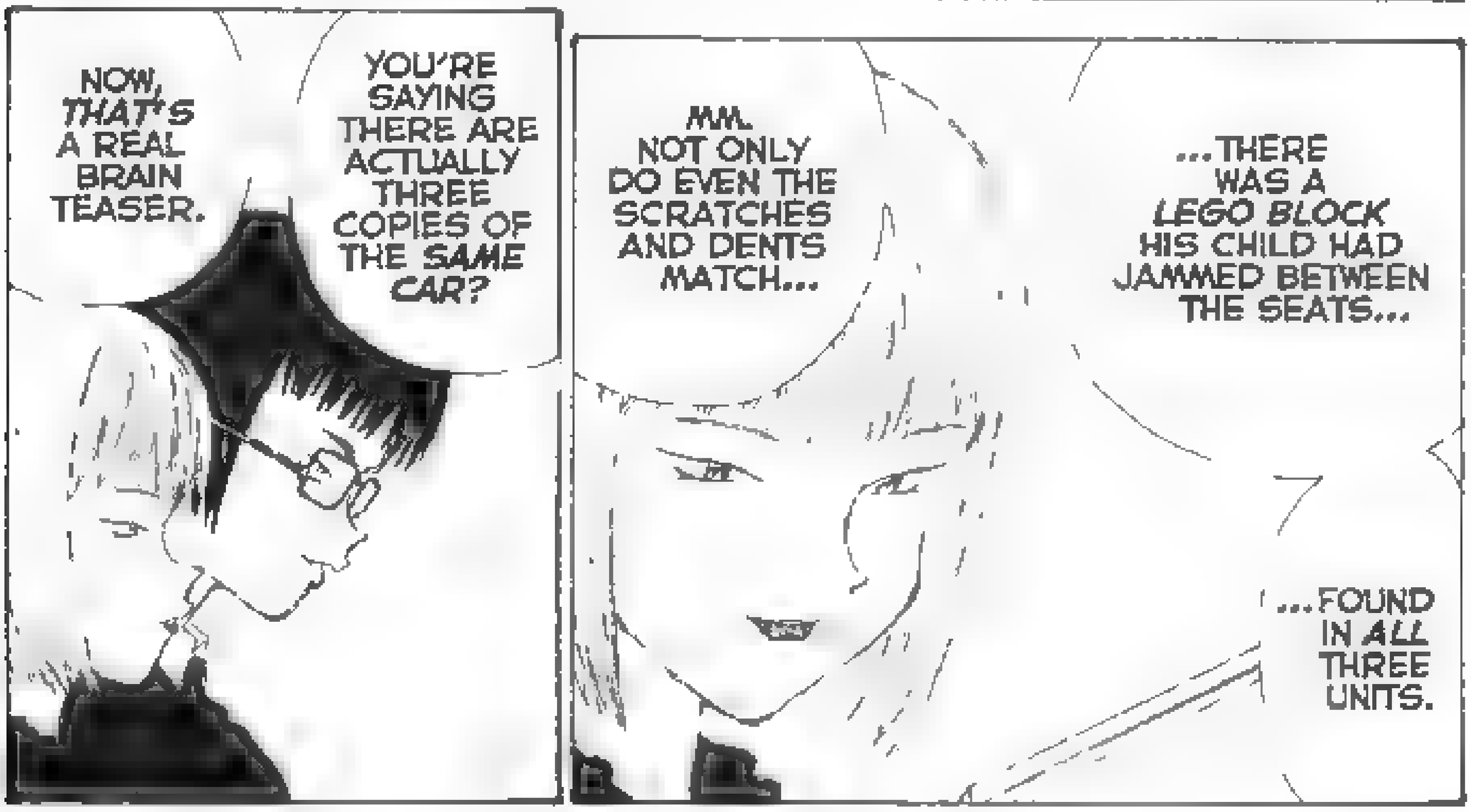
Edited Finnpest



I SEE...


NOW, THAT'S A REAL BRAIN TEASER.
YOU'RE SAYING THERE ARE ACTUALLY THREE COPIES OF THE SAME CAR?
MM. NOT ONLY DO EVEN THE SCRATCHES AND DENTS MATCH...
...THERE WAS A LEGO BLOCK HIS CHILD HAD JAMMED BETWEEN THE SEATS...
...FOUND IN ALL THREE UNITS.

NO WAY IT COULD HAVE BEEN FOUND EXCEPT BY DISMANTLING THE VEHICLE. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON WE FOUND IT.

EVEN COLONEL OLDS WAS NOT AWARE IT.

SO THEY'RE NOT SO MUCH COPIES...

...AS MULTIPLE INSTANCES OF THE SAME UNIT.

WHAT ABOUT THE IMPOUNDED VEHICLE?

THE TESTING STATION WILL COMPLAIN SOON.

YEAH... TOUGH.

BUT IT MATCHES MAJOR OLDS' CAR, DOWN TO THE V.I.N., RIGHT?

YES.

HMM... WE CAN'T JUST *SELL* SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

THERE'D BE REGISTRATION PROBLEMS.

THOUGH I'D LOVE TO PAD THE BUDGET FOR OUR YEAR-END PARTY...

I SUPPOSE... I COULDN'T JUST *KEEP* IT...?

CERTAINLY...

...NOT. ♥

THEN, SHALL WE SCRAP IT?

WHAT A WASTE.

I LIKE THAT CAR...

THANK OUR FRIENDS IN THE MEDIA WHEN YOU GET A CHANCE.

WHENEVER. NO HURRY.

TRUE.

PEOPLE IN HIGH PLACES ARE *PLEASANT*, AREN'T THEY, MR. MIYAKO?

THEY KNOW WHAT LINES TO CROSS, AND WHICH *NOT* TO CROSS.

YES... IT'S NICE HOW PEOPLE WITH A LOT TO PROTECT...

...ARE SO *EASY* TO CONTROL.

MISS SATO, BITE YOUR TONGUE.

YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF FANS IN THE DEPART-MENT.

AND THEY ALL HATE ME...

I DO. AND EVERYWHERE ELSE, TOO. I TAKE *FULL* ADVANTAGE OF MY IMAGE.

HA HA HA!

UNLEASHED YOUR CHARMS ON THE MEDIA BIGWIGS, DID YOU?

AH, WELL. AT LEAST *ONE* PERSON FELL FOR OUR LITTLE TRICK.

NOT *TWO*...?

NO.

THE OTHER ONE KNEW WHAT THE NEWS REPORTS WERE FOR.

HE WAS *WATCHING*, SAME AS US...

...FOR WHOM-EVER SHOWED UP.

SCARY.

SO HE USED US...?

YES. BUT *THAT'S* OKAY.

WE NEED *ANY* DATA WE CAN GET.

WHICH REMINDS ME...

...THERE ARE SOME FREELANCE JOURNALISTS ON THE STORY.

PEOPLE *WITHOUT* ANYTHING TO PROTECT, YOU MEAN?

YES. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

WHERE DID THEY HEAR ABOUT IT...?

THAT I *DON'T* KNOW.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

IF I ANSWER...

YOU'LL NAIL ME AGAIN.

HA HA HA. MAYBE.

MEN MAKE THINGS SO COMPLICATED.

THANK GOODNESS WE WOMEN ARE SIMPLE.

WE *LIKE.* OR WE *DISLIKE.*

PERIOD.

HMM...

VERY SCARY.

BRMBS

WE'RE UNDER ASSAULT.

HA HA!

CHK

KLIK KLIK

VROOM

OH, AREN'T YOU WELL BEHAVED.

JUST FOR TODAY.

BRMEEE

KTAK

WEEEOOOUUU

VROOOM

WEEOOOUUU

VRMM

HEE HEE!

WEEOOOUUU

WHSSHH

VRMMMBBB

WEEOOOUUU

JAPANESE PEOPLE DRIVING FOREIGN CARS. *PITIFUL.*

OUR CARS ARE THE BEST IN THE *WORLD!*

GOD, YOU'RE SUCH A *CHILD* SOMETIMES.

AREN'T YOU...?

THE COPS DON'T LIKE ME. YOU DO IT, PLEASE.

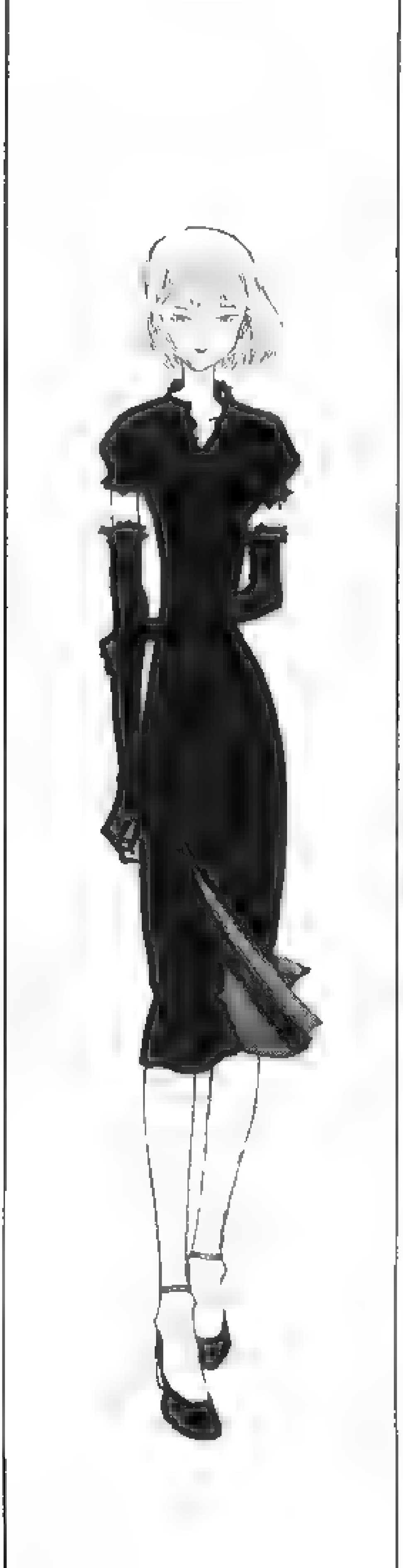
ME? WHY?

I ALWAYS PRESSURE THEM FROM ABOVE; USE THEM HARD, GIVE THEM NOTHING.

WELL, THAT'S A *BUREAU-CRAT* FOR YOU.

EXCESS INFORMATION ACTUALLY *LOWERS* THE CAPABILITIES...

...OF THOSE WHO CAN'T *PROCESS* IT PROPERLY.



SAID YOUR FARE-WELLS?

YEAH.

NOW...

...ON TO OUR *NEXT* JOB

PUT OUT THAT INFOR-MATION.

YES, SIR.

ANY INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW MUCH TO PUSH THEM?

NAW.

IF THEY AIR IT, THAT'LL BE PLENTY.

THIS'LL BE FUN...

AND NOW, TO OUR NEXT STORY.

THIS FOOTAGE WAS FILMED NEAR THE...

...JAPANESE GROUND SELF-DEFENSE FORCE EAST FUJI TRAINING AREA.

THE OBJECT IN FORMATION WITH THE TWO HELICOPTERS HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE.

MILITARY EXPERTS SPECULATE IT'S AN UNMANNED RECONNAISSANCE VEHICLE.

UNTIL NOW THE SELF-DEFENSE FORCES HAVE NEVER DEVELOPED SUCH EQUIPMENT IN SECRECY. OUTRAGED CITIZENS' GROUPS ARE CALLING FOR...

HER FIRST ERRAND

S-SEE YOU... LATER.

HAVE A *NICE* DAY, DEAR.

SO LONG.

KCHAK

SIGHH

IT'S ONLY A HALF-DAY TODAY.

SHE'LL BE OKAY.

"STEP BY STEP" ...IS THAT IT?

GOD, IT'S BEEN HARD.

WHAT *HAPPENED* TO HER OVER SUMMER VACATION ...?

MAYBE THAT GIRL KNOWS ...?

SHIINA, YOU MEAN?

I *COULD* ASK, BUT... I DON'T WANT TO BUTT IN.

I HAVE A FEELING SHE'S *REALLY* TRYING TO HELP AKIRA.

SHIINA...

WILL YOU BEHAVE? I HOPE?

EAST FUJI TRAINING GROUND ....

SHE CALLED ME ABOUT IT, SO MAYBE SHE WILL...?

OR MAY-BE...

DON'T GO ALONE, SHIINA!

NOT TO EAST FUJI...

KOMORI.

KOMORI'S PLACE.

A TRAP?

I, I...

I SHOULDN'T GET INVOLVED.

KOMORI'S WITH THE SDF?

SO HE DIDN'T DIE?

THAT LET-TER...

I SHOULD ....

BUT...

FRIENDS?

THAT GUY?

THAT... TAKEO GUY...

A FRIEND?

AN-GEL...

DIED...

DON'T GET IN-VOLVED...

NAO-ZUMI...

WHAT...

...WHAT ABOUT HIM?

DOES HE...

...HAVE ONE, TOO?

A "DRAGON CHILD" ...?

NAOZUMI...

FOR-
GET...

FORGET!

SCHOOL
....

GOT TO... GO.

AFRAID
....

SWEAT-ING...

NO. IT'S OKAY.

YOU DECIDED TO GO... STARTING TODAY.

DO IT!

OH...
....

AH
...?!

AKIRA SAKU-RA... AKIRA ...?

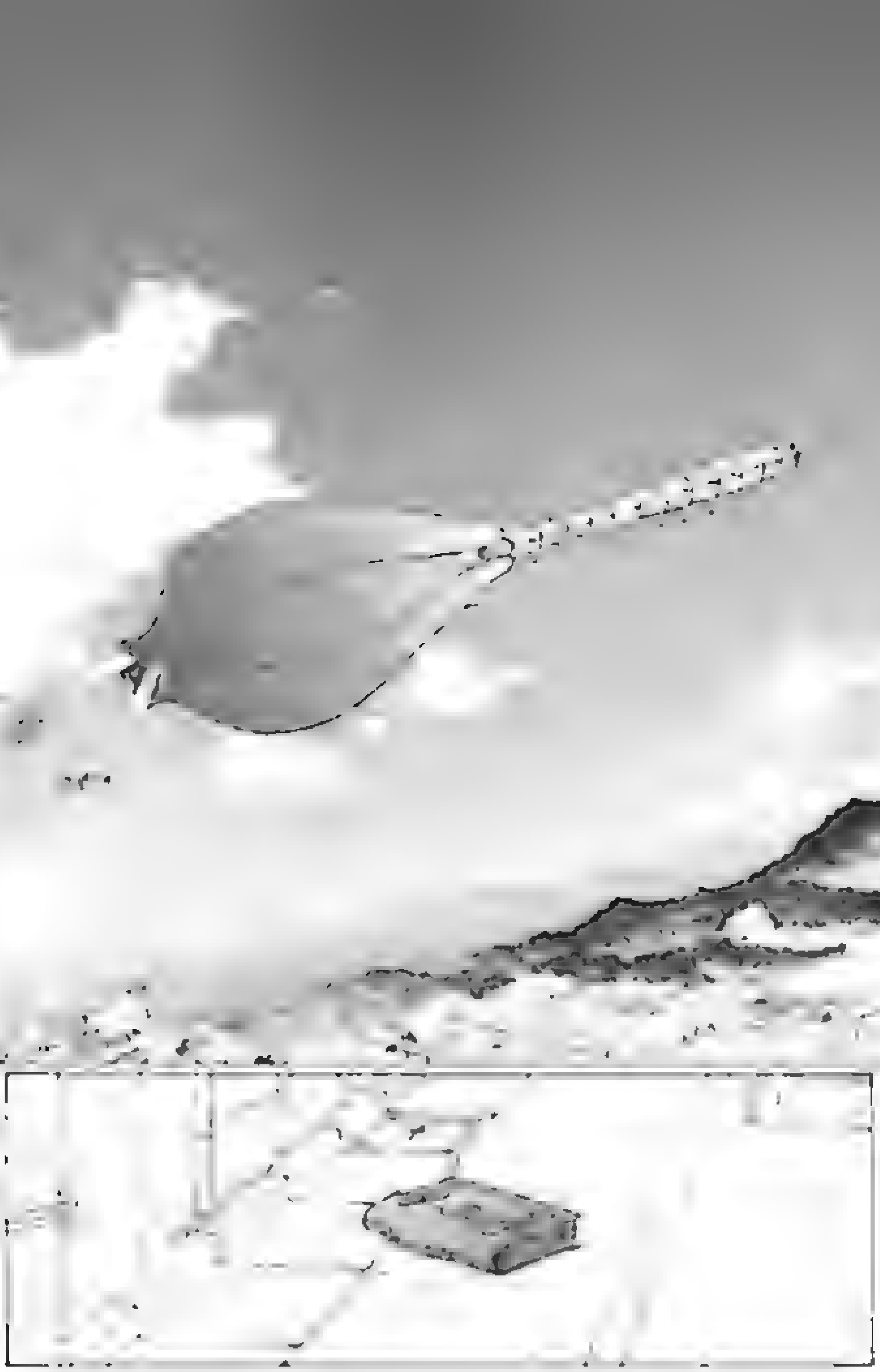
HMM... ABSENT AGAIN?

THINK MISS WEIRDO'S STILL ALIVE?

THINK ANYONE WOULD CARE?

HEY, KAZ! WHY DON'CHA GO GIVE "SLEEPING BEAUTY" HER WAKE-UP KISS?!

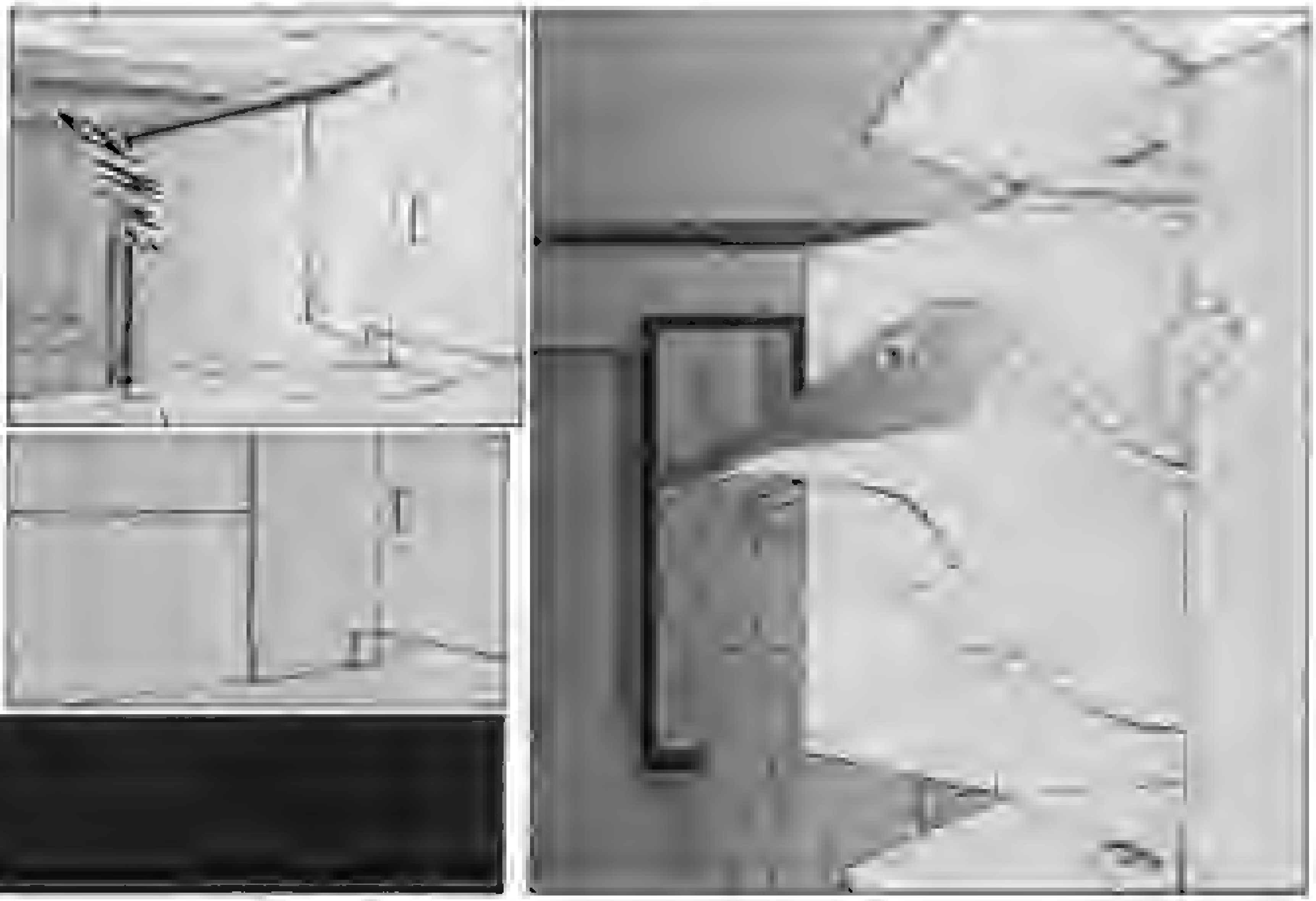
DROP DEAD, YOU BITCH!



AHH ...!!

SH...
SHII-
NA...

SHIINA
...!!



SHAK

FWMP

HON ...? DID YOU HEAR THE BACK DOOR JUST NOW?

N- NO... I DON'T *THINK* SO...

GOT TO GET TO *SHIINA'S* PLACE...

N-
NOW...
WHAT
...?

GRRR

BOWSER

WHSSHHH

>HAHH=
>HHFF=
>HAHH=
>HAHN=

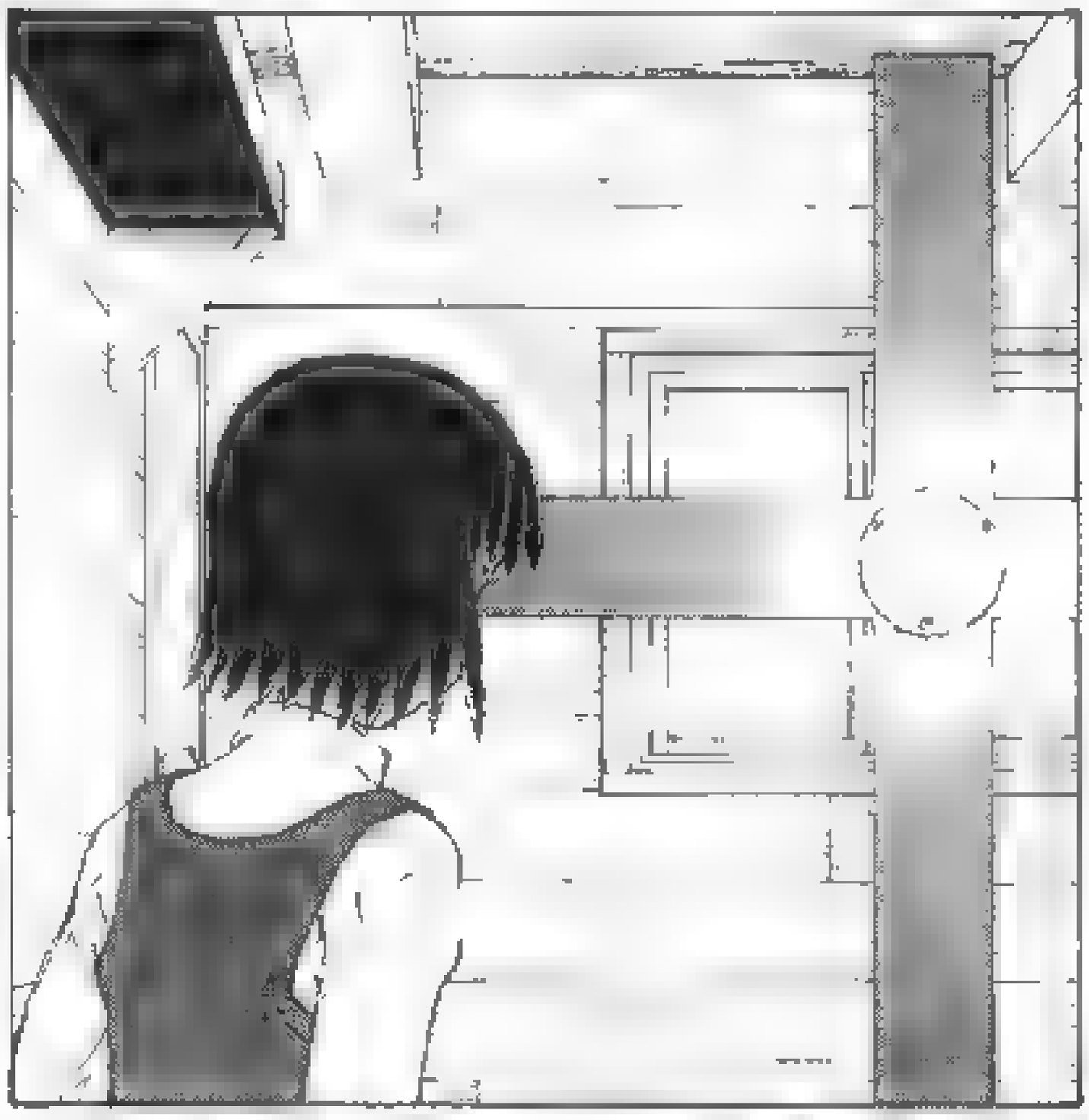
OH, GOD... CAN I... HE...REALLY *MAKE* IT?

TELE-PHONE!

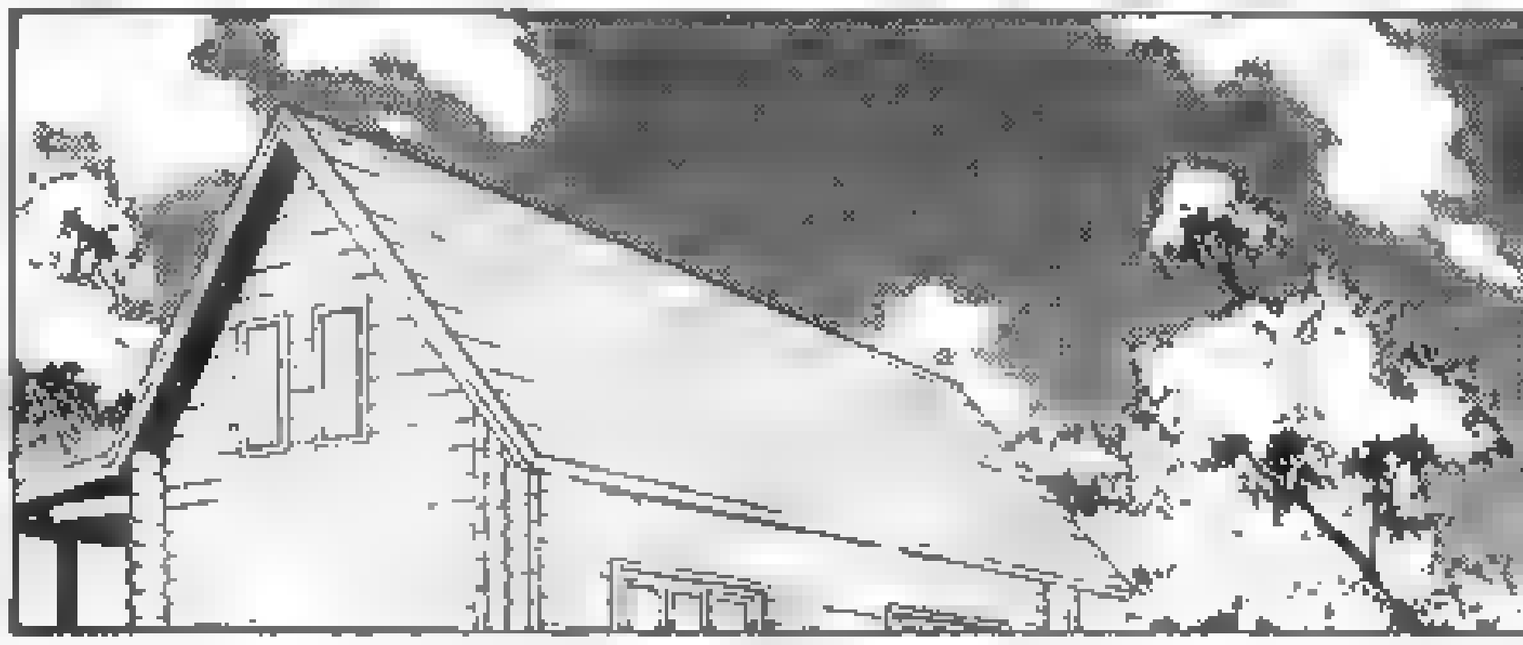
I COULD HAVE JUST *CALLED HER FROM HOME!*

"SHIINA WOULD KNOW. EVEN A SILENT PHONE CALL... SHE'D KNOW!!"

PULP



GOT TO... BE STRONG.



YOU FIGURE IT'S A NEW *URV* ...?

I WATCHED THAT VIDEO *TWENTY* TIMES-- *NO MAIN WING!*

YEAH, AND NOT ENOUGH ASPECT RATIO TO BE A LIFTING BODY.

DUNNO... MAYBE THEY'RE USING THRUST VECTORING ...?

THE *SOF'S UP* TO SOMETHING, *MAN.*

YEAH ...?

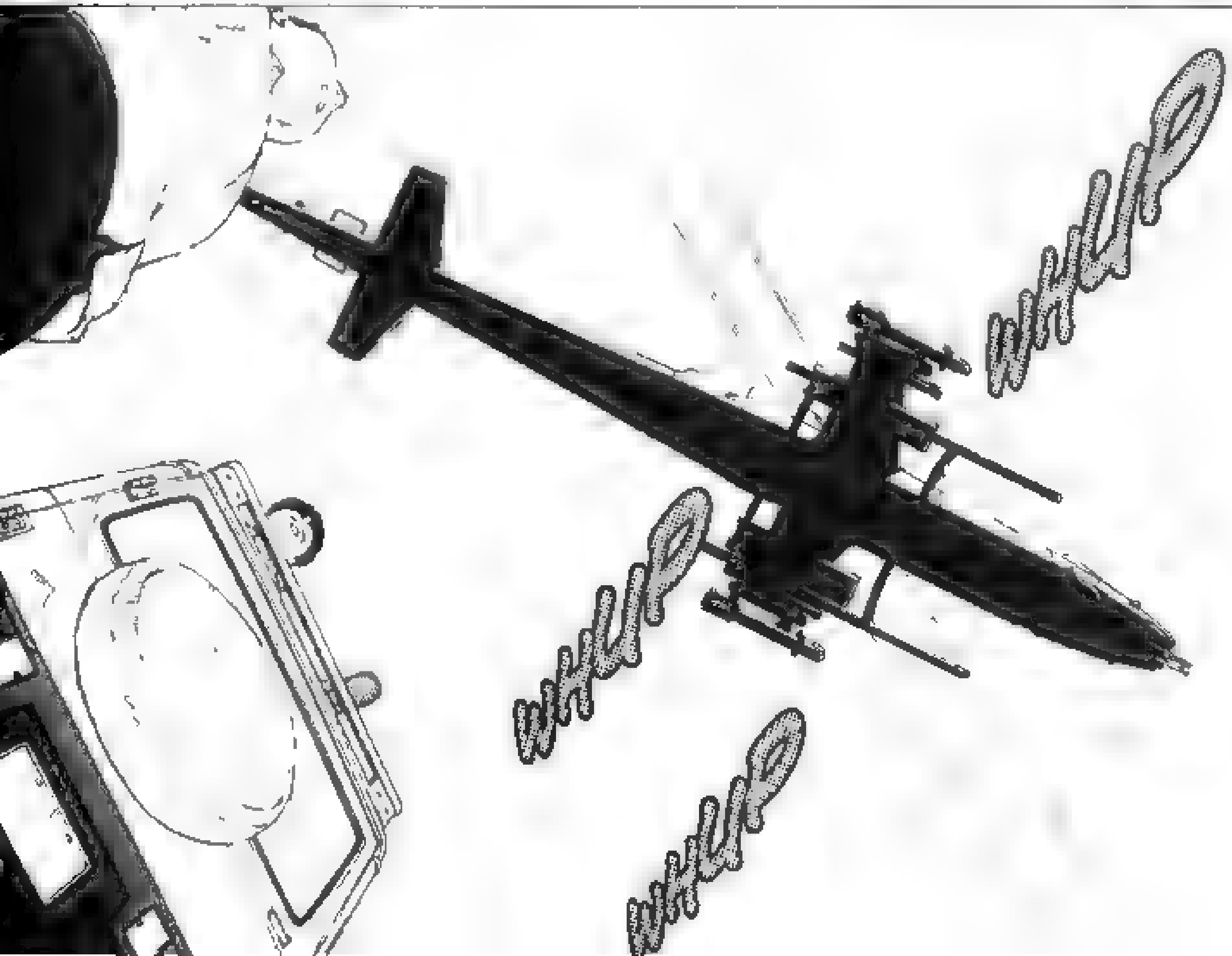
YOU HEARD THEY TRANSFERRED A *COBRA PLUS* WING DOWN FROM KISARAZU?

YEAH, I HEARD.

AND THAT THE *ASDF'S TWENTY-FIRST SQUADRON* JUST DEPLOYED TO HAMAMATSU ...?

THE *TWENTY-FIRST?*

BUT... *THEY'RE* THE... ...?!



WHUP WHUP WHUP WHUP

COBRA PLUS!!

IT'S CARRYING *LIVE* HELLFIRES! THIS AIN'T NO *DRILL!*

SEE YA ...!

YES! TIME FOR HOME COOKING CLASS!

NOW, THIS IS GONNA BE...

...FUN?

!!

EN...

ENSOF ...?!

AKIRA!!

WHAT'S WRONG?!

help

HOSHI-
MARU!

WHSSSHTT

WE'VE GOT AN *UNKNOWN* ON THE DOPPLER RADAR, SIR.

NO *IFF* SQUAWK?

...WE'RE *LOSING* IT, SIR.

USE THE PHASED-ARRAY!

ATC REPORTS NO KNOWN AIRCRAFT IN AREA, SIR!

RIGHT!

MARK IT *"TARGET."*

AND I'LL *BET* IT'S HEADED RIGHT WHERE THE *LAST* ONE WENT--

--OUR *EAST FUJI TRAINING RANGE!*

TO BE CONTINUED...

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